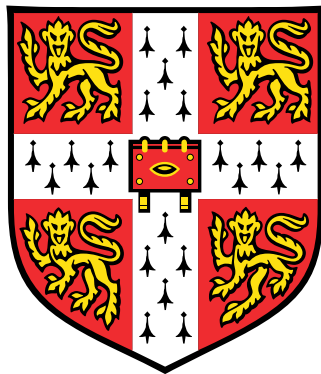


Non-Representationalism and Metaphysics

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Abstract

In recent years there has been increasing interest in philosophical theories which downplay the importance of the idea that our words and thoughts represent aspects of the world. The best-known example of these non-representational theories is metaethical expressivism, the view that ethical language and thought is best understood not as representing or describing ethical features of the world, but as expressing our attitudes towards it. Other theories apply similar ideas to other kinds of language and thought, and global versions apply it to all kinds. Non-representationalism has undergone a major shift in the last few decades, and lack of clarity about what it now involves has led some to worry that it is either unintelligible, or else indistinguishable from its representationalist rivals. In the first part of my thesis, I offer a novel reading of the new kind of non-representationalism. I argue that this reading, for the first time, makes the view both intelligible and distinct from representationalism. However I also show that this reading collapses one of the major debates in the recent literature – the debate between global and local non-representationalists. This debate turns out to be empty: properly understood, the disputants already agree with each other.

Many writers think that non-representationalism threatens metaphysics, particularly theories which purport to say what makes statements of given kinds true, and to what various kinds of terms refer. Some take this to be an advantage of the view, others a disadvantage. In the second part of my thesis I argue that this common view is deeply mistaken – non-representationalism does not undermine metaphysics. I respond to a number of recent arguments, showing that neither global nor local forms of non-representationalism undermine metaphysics. I argue that non-representationalism is compatible with metaphysics, and that this is not a problem for the view.

Preface and acknowledgements

This dissertation is the result of my own work and includes nothing which is the outcome of work done in collaboration except as declared in the Preface and specified in the text. It is not substantially the same as any that I have submitted, or, is being concurrently submitted for a degree or diploma or other qualification at the University of Cambridge or any other University or similar institution except as declared in the Preface and specified in the text. I further state that no substantial part of my dissertation has already been submitted, or, is being concurrently submitted for any such degree, diploma or other qualification at the University of Cambridge or any other University or similar institution except as declared in the Preface and specified in the text. It does not exceed the prescribed word limit for the relevant Degree Committee.

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

This thesis is about a view I'm going to call *non-representationalist pragmatism*, or sometimes simply *non-representationalism* or *pragmatism*. In the broadest possible terms, this is a view which casts suspicion on the philosophical importance of the idea that our thought and language functions to represent the world. My thesis aims to make sense of recent versions of this view, and then use this result to examine some questions about it. After giving a clear interpretation of non-representationalism, I will show how this interpretation helps us solve two recent debates in the literature, one about how to distinguish non-representationalism about ethical language from its rivals, and one about whether non-representationalism can be true of all kinds of language or only some. After that, I will turn to a bigger question: what impact does non-representationalism have on metaphysics? In this introductory chapter, I will set the scene for my discussion, providing a non-specialist's introduction to non-representationalism. I will then sketch out the main results I will argue for in the following chapters.

1.1 From emotivism to expressivism

In his classic book *Language, Truth and Logic* (1936), A.J. Ayer defended a radical view about ethical language and thought, known as emotivism.¹ Emotivism is the view that ethical language expresses emotions, and as such ethical mental states and sentences are not the kinds of thing which can be true or false. Nor can they be said to express propositions, or state facts. Here's Ayer setting out his view:

Thus if I say to someone, 'You acted wrongly in stealing that money,' I am not stating anything more than if I had simply

¹ Other defenders of this view include Stevenson (1937), Barnes (1933), and Ogden & Richards (1923).

said, 'You stole that money.' In adding that this action is wrong I am not making any further statement about it. I am simply evincing my moral disapproval of it. ... If I now generalize my previous statement and say, 'Stealing money is wrong,' I produce a sentence which has no factual meaning – that is, expresses no proposition which can be either true or false. ... For in saying that a certain type of action is right or wrong, I am not making any factual statement, not even a statement about my own state of mind. I am merely expressing certain moral sentiments. (Ayer, 1936, p.110)

According to Ayer, ethical language contrasts with language about the empirical world in two key respects. Ethical sentences *lack* features sentences like 'grass is green' have: they lack truth-conditions, they do not express propositions, they do not attempt to state facts. But they *have* a role that sentences like 'grass is green' do not have: they express or evince emotions.

Emotivism is controversial, and it has little support these days. But it has a philosophical descendant in a view known as ethical or meta-ethical *expressivism*. Expressivism is not just a position in ethics – you can be an expressivist about other kinds of language, as we'll see later. However its best known application is in ethics. Its most prominent defenders are Allan Gibbard (1990; 2003; 2013) and Simon Blackburn (1984; 1993; 1998; 2010a). Expressivism has undergone a huge shift in the last four decades or so. Earlier versions of expressivism joined Ayer in saying that ethical sentences lacked truth-values and so on. For instance here's Gibbard in his first book, *Wise Choices, Apt Feelings* (1990), discussing an expressivist theory of the term 'rational':

[Expressivism] is non-cognitivist in the narrow sense that, according to it, to call a thing rational is not to state a matter of fact, either truly or falsely. (Gibbard, 1990, p.8)

Gibbard and Blackburn also distinguished themselves by focusing on the psychological notion of belief, and arguing that ethical mental states should not be thought of as beliefs. For instance, in his book *Spreading the Word* (1984), Blackburn introduces expressivist theories by saying that according to them the commitments they discuss

are contrasted with others – call them judgements, beliefs, assertions, or propositions – which have truth-conditions (Blackburn, 1984, p.167)

Early expressivist views are therefore very similar to Ayer's in their rejection of the applicability of notions like truth, proposition and belief to ethical language. Note also Gibbard's use of the term 'non-cognitivist', which is still used in these debates to refer to views like emotivism and expressivism. In general 'non-cognitivism', at least within meta-ethics, is applied to those views which deny (or are read as denying) that ethical sentences have truth-conditions, express beliefs, and so on.

However, expressivism has undergone a shift in the last four decades or so. Expressivists have begun to drop their original denials, the ones they shared with Ayer. They no longer deny that ethical sentences are truth-apt, or that they express propositions, and (when true) state facts. Indeed they no longer deny that ethical mental states are *beliefs*. For instance, in a recent paper Gibbard says:

As some writers use the term, being an expressivist regarding ethics involves denying that ethical judgments can be true, and denying that they are beliefs. In my first book ... I did issue such denials. Eventually, though, I was convinced—especially by Horwich—that deflationary truth was the only kind of truth I understood, and that I didn't understand what I was denying when I excluded ethical judgments from being 'beliefs'. (Gibbard, 2015, p.211)

More starkly, in a recent paper on moral realism, Blackburn says that he agrees to all three of the claims which Richard Boyd (1988) takes to be definitive of realism:

So here are some things I can sign up to, exactly as Boyd expresses them in that paper:

1. Moral statements are the sorts of statements which are (or which express propositions which are) true or false (or approximately true, largely false, etc.).
2. The truth or falsity (approximate truth...) of moral statements is largely independent of our moral opinions, theories, etc.

3. Ordinary canons of moral reasoning—together with ordinary canons of scientific and everyday factual reasoning—constitute, under many circumstances at least, a reliable method for obtaining and improving (approximate) moral knowledge.

I agree to all these claims. (Blackburn, 2015, pp.842-843)

Gone, then, are all the denials which made Ayer's view distinctive and radical.

Despite no longer denying that ethical language is truth-apt, expresses propositions, and so on, expressivists still hold two distinct views. The first is their core claim about ethical language, which is that it expresses practical attitudes which are, in some way, to be contrasted with beliefs. The second is their *suspicion* of notions like truth, belief, and others. This is best called a suspicion because it doesn't extend so far as denying that those notions apply to ethical language. Instead it's a suspicion of the utility of notions like truth and belief in philosophical projects. For instance, Blackburn expresses doubts about the philosophical utility of the notion of belief in ethics:

Should all these activities [of using ethical language] be herded together as 'expressing ethical beliefs'? It is hard to see how that could be useful to do so. It would be labelling at a level of abstraction that makes the interesting detail invisible. (Blackburn, 1998, p.51)

We can find similar claims in recent work by Gibbard, when discussing the expressivists' explanation of ethical mental states:

The state of mind expressed by 'Stealing is wrong' can't be specified, in the explanation, as anything like 'believing that stealing is wrong' ... We can't just say that there's a general relation of believing a proposition, and that believing that stealing is wrong is standing in this relation to the proposition that stealing is wrong. (Gibbard, 2015, p.212)

Here we see the idea that we can give a theory of ethical language without invoking these notions. One of the main tasks of the first part of this thesis is to give an account of this suspicion, and Chapter 2 is devoted to this task.

To sum up, then, Blackburn and Gibbard's positions combine a suspicion of notions like truth and belief, at least as applied to ethics, with a

positive theory of ethical language which doesn't invoke these notions. This is expressivism about ethical language. But expressivism's core views fan out in two different directions.

1.2 Other notions, other kinds of language

First, we can see this suspicion of notions like truth and belief applied to various other features, including description and representation. This suspicion follows the same pattern; earlier versions of expressivism *denied* that these applied to ethical language. For instance, Blackburn explicitly contrasts expression and description, characterising expressivism as

the attempt to explain the practice of judging in a certain way, by regarding the commitments as *expressive* rather than *descriptive* (Blackburn, 1984, p.167, original emphasis)

Yet more recent versions do not deny this:

... we [expressivists] will end up applying talk of truth and representation to [ethical sentences]. For with truth comes a fully fledged vocabulary of representation: when we speak truly we represent things as being thus and so, and the things we so represent are the things referred to or quantified over in our sayings. In particular, notice that the word 'description' can go into the deflationist pot along with 'representation'. We describe how things stand with norms and values, possible worlds, or numbers and sets. We believe the results of our descriptions. (Blackburn, 2010b, p.4)

Nevertheless, the suspicion of such notions remains. Blackburn claims his favoured approach is distinctive

...in holding that representation is nevertheless not the key concept to deploy when the desire for philosophical explanation of our practice in some area is upon us. (Blackburn, 2015, p.851)

So it's clear that Blackburn and Gibbard aren't concerned merely with truth, propositions, and facts, but with belief, description and representation too.

Second, we can find similar theories applied not to ethical language but other kinds of language too. Consider for instance Amie Thomasson's

‘modal normativism’, which denies that modal claims are descriptive, or have truthmakers, and instead says that

claims of metaphysical necessity primarily serve the prescriptive function of expressing semantic rules for the terms used in them, or their consequences, while remaining in the object-language. (Thomasson, 2007, p.136)

This is similar to expressivism in taking modal language to express something distinctive; and Thomasson is clearly suspicious of the notions of description and truth as applied to modal language.² Though like Gibbard and Blackburn, she is not so suspicious as to deny that modal sentences can be true:

If claims of metaphysical necessity are not descriptions, it seems that they cannot be understood as true or false based on whether or not they correspond to modal features of the world ... Nonetheless, they may be classed as true or false in a deflationary sense. (Thomasson, 2007, p.148)

Thomasson’s view about modal language bears at least some significant similarities to expressivist views about ethics.

Elsewhere we can find similar views about other kinds of language: epistemic language:

... an epistemic expressivist holds that, as descriptive claims express factual beliefs, epistemic claims express a distinctive non-representational kind of mental state. Again, we can call it a pro-/con-attitude, a conative state, or an evaluative “belief.” It doesn’t have to be the same kind of non-representational state as expressivists think is expressed by ethical claims; and most epistemic expressivists think there must be both cognitive and conative elements in the state. What is important is that epistemic judgments have, at least in part, a desire-like direction of fit with the world. (Chrisman, 2012, p.119)

probabilistic language:

² Blackburn has defended an expressivist view of modal language (Blackburn, 1987), as well as a similar view of causal language (1990a).

Briefly, it [the view Yalcin calls *credal expressivism*] develops the thought that in asserting something like

1. Allan is probably in his office,

one may express an aspect of one's credal state, without describing that state. One expresses one's confidence, that is, without literally saying that one is confident. The relevant credal state expressed is of course a doxastic (hence 'cognitive') state, but it is not a state tantamount to full belief in a proposition. Credal expressivism is what I call this view. (Yalcin, 2012, p.125)

causal language:

On this view ... causal claims project our inferential commitments onto the world, rather than representing a mind-independent relation that somehow licenses those inferences. (Beebe, 2015, p.25)

semantic ascriptions:

To believe this claim [an ascription of meaning] is to be in a state of planning (Gibbard, 2013, p.180)

and plenty of other kinds of language too. Bar-On and Sias (2013, n.7 p.710) give a comprehensive list of references for distinctively expressivist views about the above kinds of language, including some of the papers I have just quoted from, and add references to similar views about aesthetic claims, attributions of mental states, conditionals, epistemic modals, and logical claims.

What we have here is a motley of related views. They are related in two ways. First, they are related in virtue of some kind of suspicion of truth, reference, belief, representation, and the rest, at least with regard to a certain kind of language. This suspicion may or may not go as far as Ayer's did; it may or may not result in *rejection* of those notions for the language in question. The second way in which these views are related is in the idea that we should theorise about the relevant kind of language without using the notions on which they cast suspicion.

1.3 At last: non-representationalist pragmatism

There is clearly a common thread which ties these views together, even if only loosely. It would seem reasonable to have a label for views which have this common thread running through them. This apparently trivial problem, however, has caused perennial headaches. To start with, some popular names inherit connotations of earlier theories like Ayer's, which *denied* the applicability of truth and others to the language in question. For instance, 'non-factualism', 'non-descriptivism', and 'non-cognitivism' are all used in the literature. The problem with these is that they don't fit newer theories whose suspicion of truth and the other notions doesn't make them deny that those notions apply. 'Non-descriptivism', for instance, sounds like the view that the relevant claims don't describe. But this would be a misleading name for Blackburn's view of ethical language, since as we saw he thinks that ethical claims *do* describe. So these terms, while probably appropriate for Ayer-style views, are very misleading as applied to the family of views in general.

Other names on offer are too narrow. 'Expressivism' works nicely for ethics and other views which focus on expression of mental states. But it doesn't seem to pick out the unifying feature of this family of theories, which is their suspicion of the notions of truth, belief, reference, and so on. Some philosophers like Paul Horwich and Huw Price, doubt that notions like truth, reference and representation can ever help us in philosophical theorising:

... truth is not, as often assumed, a *deep* concept and should not be given a pivotal role in philosophical theorizing. It cannot be the basis of our conceptions of meaning, or of justification, or of logic. (Horwich, 2010, p.16)

In particular, it is open to us to take the view that at least by the time we get to language, there is no useful external notion, *of a semantic kind*—in other words, no useful, general, notion of relations that words and sentences bear to the external world, that we might usefully identify with truth and reference. (Price, 2011, p.21)

Writers like Price and Horwich do not go on to give any recognisably expressivist theory of any part of language. They are more interested in the

notions of truth, reference and others themselves, rather than their applicability to a limited range of language like ethical language.

What about leaving ‘expressivism’ behind and going for a more familiar ‘ism’ name: ‘anti-realism’, ‘irrealism’, ‘non-realism’? Admittedly these kinds of names have been applied to the kinds of views we’re discussing, including by proponents of those views. For instance, an earlier paper by Blackburn is entitled ‘How to Be an Ethical Anti-Realist’ (Blackburn, 1988). But these names are just as misleading as ‘non-cognitivism’ and similar names. For the mark of anti-realism is often thought to be to deny the truth of the relevant sentences, or to deny their objectivity and say that their truth is relative to a perspective, or depends some way on us. Yet the contemporary work of Blackburn and Gibbard, for instance, contains explicit denials of these kinds of claims. Indeed some – like Dreier (2004) – have begun to wonder what the difference is between Blackburn and Gibbard’s view on the one hand, and the most staunch moral realist on the other. This will be the subject of Chapter 3. Nevertheless I think that ‘anti-realism’ and similar labels are unsuitable because of their misleading connotations.

What about ‘pragmatism’? At first it seems to suffer both of the defects of the names above: it’s too broad, for one can find a great many different views going under the name, and it’s misleading because it is strongly linked with the American pragmatists like James, Dewey and Peirce. On the other hand it is currently popular in the literature on these views.³ And some recent historical work has tied modern day views like Blackburn’s, to these earlier pragmatist views, often by way of Wittgenstein.⁴

Moreover, ‘pragmatism’ does seem to capture the approach of the views I’ve been describing, which often focuses on how to account for our *use* of the relevant kind of language. This is particularly strong in the more influential voices in the literature. Blackburn describes what he calls the ‘pragmatic tradition’ like so:

It says that it is no good looking to see what laws or possibilities or values or numbers are ‘made up of’. They are not substances you can put under a microscope or on a petri dish or in a retort. They are categories with which we think. The key to understanding them, therefore, is to see what such thinking *does for*

³ For instance see the title and the papers in Price (2013).

⁴ See Misak (2016) and the collected essays in Misak & Price (Forthcoming).

us. What is its function and purpose? (Blackburn, 2015, p.850, emphasis added)

Price describes it in a similar way, arguing that his aim is

to explain in naturalistic terms how creatures like us come to talk in these various ways. This is a matter of explaining what role the different language games play in our lives – what differences there are between the functions of talk of value and the functions of talk of electrons, for example. (Price, 2013, p.20)

The focus here is on the role of the relevant concepts and language in human life. In the above quotations we can also see the influence of the later Wittgenstein, with the ideas of language games and meaning as use. Both Price and Blackburn have explicitly acknowledged this influence.⁵

But this doesn't by itself seem to deserve the name 'pragmatism'. For not only do many other kinds of theory go under that name. It also seems open for someone to claim that they are interested in the role of language in human life, and to say things which echo what Blackburn and Price said above, yet still reject the suspicion of truth, belief, representation, and so on which seems to link all the theories I have been discussing. For this reason I think a good name for this approach would be to follow the trail of 'representationalism', an idea common in recent literature, and give the extremely unlovely label 'non-representationalist pragmatism' to this family of views. Alternatively, we can call it 'non-representationalism', 'NRP', or just 'pragmatism' for short. In this thesis if I use any of these terms, I mean 'non-representational pragmatism' unless otherwise stated. I will also let 'NRP' serve as a count noun, so that we can call Gibbard and the like *NRPs* too. This name seems to better capture the family of views: they are interested in accounting for the use or role of the relevant language and thought, and doing it in a way which eschews truth, reference, representation, belief, and so on, though this needn't go so far as rejecting those notions entirely.

1.4 Making sense of suspicion

So far, then, we have a family of views which are only loosely linked by some kind of suspicion of truth, reference, representation and so on. But

⁵ See Blackburn (1990b, 2013, 2015), (Price, 2011, ch.1, *passim*) and Price (2004) for examples.

it's not clear what this suspicion amounts to. In Ayer's view it amounted to rejecting truth and the rest, in the case of ethical language at least. But in this thesis I am going to focus on the more recent kind of NRP in which this suspicion does not go so far as rejection. There seem to be two approaches which NRPs take. The first is that they say that while ethical sentences (for instance) express propositions, or represent the world, and so on, they do so only in a 'quasi' 'minimal', 'thin', 'deflationary', 'lower-case' or 'insubstantial' sense. Consider for instance these two short passages from Gibbard:

Are oughts, then, matters of fact? In a minimalist sense of the term 'fact', there are of course facts of what a person ought to do.

Plan-laden statements will be true or false in a minimal sense ... In the book I use "true" in this minimal sense (Gibbard, 2006, pp.687, 690)

Sometimes this is contrasted with a more 'real' 'robust', 'thick', 'inflationary', 'upper-case', or 'substantial' sense which the language in question is said to lack.⁶ This might be a sense which NRPs say is as yet undefined:

Are these [ethical facts] just pseudo-facts, incapable of real truth and falsehood? Are beliefs in them pseudo-beliefs, states of mind distinct from beliefs, which we mistake for genuine beliefs? I took no stand on this at the outset, but what do I now conclude? I still weasel: I say that I need to understand the questions. Explain to me "real facts", "substantial truth", and "genuine belief", and I can think how to answer. (Gibbard, 2003, p.182)

For it is not as if we had a notion of what it would be to come across 'genuine' causal, moral facts, but unfortunately have to content ourselves with talking as if we had performed this feat, when we have not done so. (Blackburn, 1986, p.206)

Here Blackburn and Gibbard are making some kind of distinction between minimal and non-minimal senses of notions like truth, belief and the like;

⁶ For examples of the 'thin'/'thick'-style distinctions, see Williams (2013, pp.130-131) (robust) Price & O'Leary-Hawthorne (1996, *passim*) (thick, substantial), Macarthur & Price (2007, p.240) (substantial, thick), (Blackburn, 1999, p.217) (substantive, robust, upper-case), Price (2013, p.24) ('big-R' – upper case). See also van Roojen (2014).

though we can also see some doubt about any reasonable way of cashing out any non-minimal sense of these notions.

Aside from this distinction, some NRPs focus on the role of the relevant notions in philosophical theory and explanation; their suspicion is that these concepts are in some way unhelpful in our theory:

Where pragmatism is distinctive is in holding that representation is nevertheless not the key concept to deploy when the desire for philosophical explanation of our practice in some area is upon us. It is not the way to understand the kind of thought or the part of language in question, whereas a different focus on the function of terms in the lives of thinkers and talkers, is the better option. (Blackburn, 2015, p.851)

But what exactly do these two ideas – the minimal/robust distinction, and the use of representation in our philosophical theories – really come to?

In Chapter 2 I will give a detailed explanation of what these ideas are and how they work. I outline three different stances non-representationalists have taken up regarding representation and similar features, at least as they apply to a given area of language. These three stances are:

Rejection The language in question is not representational

Qualified Rejection The language in question is representational in one sense but not others

Explanatory Scepticism The best explanation of the language in question does not treat it as representational

The latter principle is, I claim, the core of non-representationalism: it is the best way of cashing out NRPs' suspicion of representation and related concepts.

Explanatory scepticism, as I call it, is the idea that we can *explain* the language we're interested in without saying it is representational, ascribing truth-conditions to it, saying it expresses beliefs, and so on. This raises the question of what an *explanation* of some language is. As it turns out, non-representationalists have a distinctive kind of explanation in mind. I argue that they are interested in understanding two things: what the language in question *does*, and why we have language which does *that*. This two part 'what it does and why it's there' theory is the distinctive aim of NRPs.

I argue that we can understand the ‘what it does and why it’s there’ using material set out by James Dreier (2004). To say what a word does, I argue, is to say what explains its meaning or use. Some non-representationalists prefer explaining meaning, and as such think that to say what a word does is to specify the feature of that word which *constitutes* its meaning, i.e. the feature in virtue of which that word means what it does. Other non-representationalists prefer to explain the use of the word, its actual appearance in our utterances. In their case they will be interested in the laws which explain that word use. For some, like Paul Horwich, these two explanations coincide.

Having explained explanatory scepticism and explored the distinctive ‘what it does and why it’s there’ idea, I then explain rejection and qualified rejection. As we’ve seen, rejection – the view held by Ayer – is no longer popular among non-representationalists. Instead, qualified rejection is more common. However, as I explained above, qualified rejection is often cashed out using vague words like ‘robust’ and ‘minimal’. I explain the various different uses of these words. I show what non-representationalists mean when they say that a word represents in a ‘minimal’ sense, and I explain the ways they typically understand words like ‘robust’.

Some non-representationalists deny that the language in question robustly represents the world, and they mean that it does not represent the speaker’s *environment*: this is the environmental sense of robustness. There is also a metaphysical sense of robustness, which applies not to representation but to facts, properties and truths. Metaphysically robust properties, for example, are ones which ground genuine resemblances: things which are green genuinely resemble each other in a way in which, say, things whose English names begin with the letter ‘f’, or rhyme with ‘cat’, do not. Finally, non-representationalists sometimes simply deny that there is anything more than the minimal sense of representation and the like.

Having explained the three common non-representationalist principles, established explanatory scepticism as the core of the view, and carefully explained the ‘what it does and why it’s there’ explanation of an area of language, I consider the view to be clear and to have eliminated the vagueness of words like ‘robust’ and ‘minimal’. In later chapters I take this clear foundation of non-representationalism and use it to make progress in several important and popular debates about the view.

1.5 Creeping minimalism

In Chapter 3 I discuss the so-called *problem of creeping minimalism*, first stated by James Dreier (2004). This is the problem that metaethical expressivists run into once they drop Ayer's rejection of representation, truth, and the like. The problem is this: expressivists now accept *minimalist* views of these representational concepts, and such views *entail* that even by expressivists' own lights, ethical language counts as representational, truth-apt, and so on. Expressivism now looks a lot like its rival *realism*: it is hard to tell the difference between the two views. The problem of creeping minimalism is the problem of how to tell these views apart: the idea is that minimalism *creeps* to cover all the representational concepts which we might once have used to do this.

I argue that understanding metaethical expressivism in terms of the explanatory scepticism I outlined in Chapter 2 resolves this problem. In the paper in which he initially posed the problem, Dreier offered a solution – the 'explanation' explanation – which I argue is more or less correct. I defend Dreier's view from an objection from Matthew Chrisman (2008). Chrisman's objection fails, but it prompts several interesting points. Indeed Chrisman takes his objection to give us good reason to change our whole approach to understanding ethical language, from one which focuses on concepts like representation, to one which focuses on inference instead. I accept that Dreier's original solution does not accommodate the insights behind Chrisman's objection. Nevertheless, with a minor alteration, Dreier's view – which I interpret as explanatory scepticism – solves the problem. As such we needn't accept Chrisman's shift from representation to inference.

Having established this, I then turn to several interesting problems raised by Christine Tiefensee in a recent discussion of creeping minimalism and its relationship with non-representationalism. Tiefensee's argument is pessimistic. She criticises Chrisman's inferentialist solution to the problem, showing that minimalism collapses it in the same way Chrisman thinks it collapses Dreier's. She then goes on to examine potential solutions using recent materials from two prominent non-representationalists – Huw Price's (2013) concept of 'e-representation' and Michael Williams's (2013) concept of an 'explanation of meaning in terms of use' (an 'EMU'). She argues that these, too, fail, for more or less the same reasons that Chrisman's and Dreier's failed. Tiefensee's argument is cause for concern, since

she purports to show that even the most promising and recent non-representationalist resources cannot solve the problem of creeping minimalism.

Using an argument very similar to the one I used to defend Dreier, I show that Tiefensee's arguments fail. We should therefore not be worried about the fate of expressivism in the light of creeping minimalism. I show how reading expressivism in terms of explanatory scepticism lets us avoid the issues Tiefensee raises, and how this view can accommodate the different solutions discussed in the chapter – those of Dreier, Chrisman, Price, and Williams.

1.6 Global non-representationalism?

At the end of Chapter 3 I discuss potential problems with my solution to the problem of creeping minimalism. One of them is that if expressivists accept minimalism about concepts like representation, then they themselves cannot accept representationalist views about other areas of language, say scientific language or words we use to describe our perceptions. This would be a serious consequence for expressivists. However, it links closely to another popular debate: that between *local* and *global* non-representationalists. The former think non-representationalism is true in some cases but false in others: some language *should* be explained in terms of representation. The latter deny this: no language needs to be explained as representational. Some globalists have argued for the very consequence I just sketched out: minimalism entails global non-representationalism.

In Chapter 4 I turn to this debate, which has recently seen exchanges between localists like Simon Blackburn and Allan Gibbard on the one hand, and globalists like Huw Price on the other.⁷ Indeed this debate has occupied a great deal of the recent literature on non-representationalism, with Price arguing that his globalist view is plausible, supported by the same reasons that support local applications of non-representationalism, and has radical consequences for philosophy of language and metaphysics.

I argue that the local/global debate is in fact merely verbal. Self-professed localists already accept globalism as globalists define it, but self-professed globalists already accept localism as the localists define it. This is simply because localists and globalists have different views about what it is to explain language in terms of representation. More precisely, they differ over

⁷ See Blackburn (2013); Gibbard (2015); Price (2013, 2015a).

which features count among what I call the *representational features* – the features to be excluded from non-representationalists’ explanatory theories. Localists take representational features to be relations between words (and thoughts) and their *subject matter*, for instance a reference relation between ‘Ramsey’ and Ramsey, or a relation between a word like ‘tree’ and the members of its extension, i.e. the trees. Price does not share this conception of representational features: he thinks they are word-world relations which are in some sense *general*.

After explaining the difference between these views, I show why globalism is *false* if we define it using localists’ conceptions of representational features, but that if we define it as globalists do, it actually follows from localism as localists define it. As such, localists and globalists are simply talking past each other: they already agree that both the localist’s localism and the globalist’s globalism are true.

These two chapters on creeping minimalism and the local/global debate show that carefully understanding non-representationalism not in terms of robustness and other similar ideas, but instead in terms of explanatory scepticism, pays off. It helps us defend metaethical expressivism from the problem of creeping minimalism, and better understand several arguments in the recent literature on that problem. It also allows us to completely undermine the popular local/global debate, and thereby shows us that non-representationalists should focus on other topics.

1.7 Metaphysical impact

The final two chapters of this thesis are about the metaphysical impact of non-representationalism. The view is meant to affect how we think about metaphysics: more precisely, it is meant to undermine metaphysical inquiry in some way. Earlier we saw Blackburn describing his pragmatic approach, which he contrasts with what he calls a ‘truth-theoretic’ or metaphysical approach which

identifies its problems in terms of questions of the form ‘what is the ‘truth-maker’ or the fact involved in something or other?’ ... ‘Analytical metaphysics’ looks at the elusive beasts in the philosophical jungle, such as values, norms, natural laws, alternative possibilities, numbers, and others in the same spirit. Break them apart and see what they are made up of. This is the

paradigm that has dominated recent philosophy to the point at which other approaches are invisible to many writers. (Blackburn, 2015, p.850)

On his pragmatic approach, he says, we can account for an area of language ‘without ever getting a picture of what the apparent subject matter of such thought ‘is’. As such, he argues, metaphysics ‘bows out of the picture’ (Blackburn, 2015, p.850).

Huw Price argues for the same point. He starts with metaethical expressivism:

... what is at stake is the ability of pragmatism to escape certain sorts of metaphysical or ontological questions. One of the great virtues of expressivism is the way it replaces metaphysical questions with questions about human thought and language. In place of metaphysical questions about the nature of value, or modality, say, it offers us questions about the role and genealogy of evaluative and modal vocabularies—and these are questions about human behaviour, broadly construed, rather than questions about some seemingly puzzling part of the metaphysical realm. This shift is one of the things that makes Humean expressivism attractive to naturalists. It simply sidesteps the problem of finding a placing for value (or indeed causal necessity!) in the kind of world that physics gives us reason to believe in. (There are concomitant epistemological virtues, too, as was also clear to Hume.) So naturalists should embrace the pragmatist-expressivist shift from philosophising about objects to philosophising about vocabularies (Price, 2010, p.315)

Here we can see Price shifting from expressivism’s anti-metaphysical impact to the impact of non-representationalism (the ‘pragmatist-expressivist shift’) more generally.

In order to make clear sense of what it is that non-representationalism is meant to undermine, I focus on the notion of truthmaking. This is simply the idea that our statements and beliefs are made true by the world. This is a core part of metaphysics. Moreover, we can understand common realist positions in ethics in terms of truthmaker theory. Naturalists think that ethical statements are made true by natural facts: non-naturalists think they are made true by non-natural facts. Constructivists think they are made true by

idealisation of our actual beliefs, for instance by what ideally consistent and well-informed versions of ourselves would believe. Error theorists and fictionalists think they are false, and so not made true at all. I take truthmaker theory to be a simple and comprehensive way of understanding debates like this.

We can divide the reasons why non-representationalism might undermine truthmaker investigations into two categories. The first is recent non-representationalists' commitment to minimalist or deflationary views of truth, facts, and properties. Such views, which are in general independent of specific non-representationalist views like metaethical expressivism, are commonly thought to undermine the idea that our sentences and thoughts are *made true* by the world. This is because these views say that truth is a trivial notion which has no nature, and therefore cannot explain anything, or even be explained in any more than a trivial way.

In Chapter 5 I focus on deflationism's potential impact on truthmaking. I argue that deflationism makes very little difference to truthmaking debates. Some truthmaker theorists think deflationism is incompatible with truthmaking; I show that their view rests on a misunderstanding of deflationism and of the core idea behind truthmaker theory. I also show that deflationists, including non-representationalists like Price and Blackburn, have drawn false consequences concerning truthmaking from deflationist ideas. As such, we should disregard the idea that deflationism undermines truthmaking.

The other category is non-representationalists' commitment to specific views about representation and related concepts, for instance localists' view that we don't need to explain a given area of language in terms of relations with its subject matter, and globalists' view that we never need *general* word-world relations to explain language. In Chapter 6 I focus on these ideas. I set out what I call the *basic anti-metaphysical idea*, an idea which drives the view that non-representationalism undermines metaphysics. The basic idea is simple: representation involves relations between words (and thoughts) and the world, and this raises questions about the worldly relata of those relations. Non-representationalism invokes no such relations, and so doesn't raise these questions. As Williams argues

Representationalist explanations of meaning tend to inherit the apparent ontological commitments of the vocabulary under review. A representationalist approach to moral predicates will

tend to commit us *ab initio* to moral properties, and thus (if we have naturalistic inclinations) to metaphysical worries about their character. By contrast, the only antecedent ontological commitments of use-theoretic approaches to meaning [i.e. non-representationalism] are to speakers, their utterances, and so on: that is, to things that everyone is bound to recognize anyway. (Williams, 2013, p.130)

Here Williams is using ‘use-theoretic approaches’ to mean non-representationalism: the idea is that without invoking representation, we don’t end up committed to entities as relata of representation relations.

Price takes this idea to be central to the anti-metaphysical impact of non-representationalism. In perhaps his strongest statement of the basic anti-metaphysical idea, he says:

Term by term, sentence by sentence, topic by topic, the representationalist’s semantic ladder leads us from language to the world, from words to their worldly objects. Somehow, the resulting multiplicity of kinds of entities – values, modalities, meanings, and the rest – needs to be accommodated within the natural realm. To what else, after all, could natural speakers be related by natural semantic relations?

Without a representationalist conception of the talk, however, the puzzle takes a very different form. It remains in the linguistic realm, a puzzle about a plurality of ways of talking, of forms of human linguistic behaviour. The challenge is now simply to explain in naturalistic terms how creatures like us come to talk in these various ways. ... Without representationalism, the joints between topics remain joints between kinds of behaviour, and don’t need to be mirrored in ontology of any other kind. (Price, 2013, p.20)

Representation, then, brings up questions about what is represented. Such questions are metaphysical questions about certain properties, entities, and of course truthmakers. By avoiding representation, truth, reference, and similar concepts, the basic idea goes, non-representationalists avoid raising those metaphysical questions, and so don’t need to answer them. Price calls such metaphysical worries *placement problems*: they are problems of placing certain truths and facts in the world.

As with many other ideas in this thesis, I use explanatory scepticism to make sense of the basic anti-metaphysical idea. The result is what I call the *anti-metaphysical thesis*, which is really the heart of non-representationalists' rejection of metaphysics. The thesis says this: wherever the non-representationalist can give her distinctive 'what it does and why it's there' ('WDT') theory for a discourse, they can thereby give a non-metaphysical resolution of the placement problem for that discourse. This is the core way in which non-representationalism purports to avoid metaphysics.

However, I argue that the anti-metaphysical thesis is false. First, if we read the thesis as a *global* non-representationalist does, it has a whole class of counterexamples. These are cases where we cannot explain a word without using that very word, and hence invoking its subject matter. In such a case, any placement problem we have about what that word refers to, or what makes sentences involving it true, is not resolved by the distinctive non-representationalist WDT theory of that word. The problem is simply raised again, by that very theory.

Local non-representationalists may not worry about this: it doesn't matter if global non-representationalism doesn't always let us avoid metaphysics. The more important thing is that specific local non-representationalist theories, which as we've seen *must* avoid the subject matter of the language they explain, will resolve placement problems in a non-metaphysical way, and will not be vulnerable to the above argument.

However, I show that things are much worse. Not only is the anti-metaphysical thesis false for global non-representationalism, it is false for localism too. And not only are there counterexamples to the thesis, so that non-representationalism cannot always avoid metaphysics. Instead, the thesis's *contrary* is true: such theories *never* avoid metaphysics.

This is because placement problems are not fundamentally about explaining a certain kind of language – about saying what it does and why we have it. They are about explaining truths in the discourse in question: for instance, the placement problem for ethics is fundamentally about explaining ethical truths, explaining what makes things right and wrong. Non-representationalism does not give us any such explanations. But nor does it show us that we don't need to give those explanations, nor that they are trivial, or non-metaphysical, or cannot be given. Instead, if we take non-representationalists' focus on explanatory scepticism seriously, we find that their WDT theories are simply *independent* of placement problems and the

metaphysical issues raised.

At the end of Chapter 6 I apply these points to metaethical expressivism. I argue against expressivists' claims that their view vindicates ethics, and thereby avoids the threat of error theory, the view that ethical statements are uniformly false. I also undermine the common idea that expressivism avoids the metaphysical issues of both naturalism and non-naturalism: I show that in principle it is compatible with each view, and faces the same metaphysical issues they face. Expressivism does not collapse the naturalism/non-naturalism debate: it just leaves it unaffected.

In my concluding remarks, I sketch out some issues raised by my arguments. I argue that non-representationalism is still an interesting view, and that it does make a genuine difference if we accept it. However, it should not be seen as a rival to realism or anti-realism nor as *undermining* either theory either. Instead, we should recognise a new dimension along which theories of an area of language can differ: whether they take the language in question to be representational. This sits *alongside* distinctions concerning realism and anti-realism, naturalism and non-naturalism, whereas previous writers have understood it either to be inherently anti-realist, or else to collapse these two distinctions by undermining their metaphysical foundations. My conclusion is that non-representationalism is still a viable, interesting theory, but it doesn't undermine metaphysics.

Non-representationalism is a controversial view, particularly in ethics where it has received the most attention. For instance, within ethics it faces arguments that it makes ethical sentences not truth-apt, that it makes ethical facts mind-dependent or subjective in some way, and that it cannot account for logically complex sentences involving ethical language.⁸ In this thesis I aim only to make sense of non-representationalism and its impact, and so I will not discuss these objections, instead assuming that non-representationalism succeeds on its own terms.

1.8 Conclusion

To sum up: this thesis is about non-representationalism, a view most notably applied to ethical language but also applied to many other kinds of

⁸ See for instance (Dworkin, 2011, pp.62–63), Jackson & Pettit (1998); Suikkanen (2009), and Woods (2017) for discussions of these objections.

language. It is a view which casts suspicion on the philosophical importance of the idea that our language and thought represents the world around us. In this thesis I will make sense of contemporary versions of this view, arguing that what unites them is a core claim: *explanatory scepticism*. This is the claim that the language in question can be explained in a certain way, without saying it has representational features – without saying that it represents, describes, refers, has truth-conditions, and so on.

After making sense of the view, I use this interpretation to resolve two recent debates in the literature: the problem of creeping minimalism, and the debate between local and global non-representationalism. I then turn to the question of how non-representationalism impacts metaphysics, and argue that it has very little impact. As such we need to reconceive of non-representationalism and its place in the debates it is involved in. However, this is not all bad news for the non-representationalist.

CHAPTER 2

MAKING SENSE OF NON-REPRESENTATIONALIST PRAGMATISM

2.1 Introduction

In Chapter 1, I introduced non-representationalist pragmatism – call it NRP, or just pragmatism, for short. This is a group of theories united by their suspicion of the philosophical utility of notions like truth, reference, belief and representation, at least as they apply to a limited range of language – ethical language, causal language, and so on. However, the resemblance between views as diverse as those of the writers I mentioned in the first chapter – among them Allan Gibbard, Simon Blackburn, Amie Thomasson, Paul Horwich, and Huw Price – is more of a family resemblance. There’s no single feature which all these views share, but instead a few general threads which run through them, which I’ve called a suspicion of truth, representation, and the other notions I’ve been discussing. In this chapter I will give a thorough explanation of the ways in which this suspicion is manifested.

It’s difficult to give a general account of NRP for two reasons. First, different non-representationalists may have different views about the same notion. Consider for instance Allan Gibbard and Simon Blackburn’s views about description as applied to ethical language. In his *Thinking How to Live* (2003, p.112) Gibbard seems to deny that ethical language is descriptive. On the other hand Blackburn has been happy to accept this:

In particular, notice that the word ‘description’ can go into the deflationist pot along with ‘representation’. We describe how things stand with norms and values, possible worlds, or numbers and sets. We believe the results of our descriptions (Black-

burn, 2010b, p.4)

So different NRPs may disagree over specific notions like description.

NRPs are also suspicious of different notions. For instance, in one article Blackburn accepts that ethical statements can be true and state facts:

Why does this not imply that there are no moral facts? Minimalism shows us why not. I have already given you a moral opinion of mine: women should be educated. Here is another way of putting it: it is true that women should be educated. Here is another: it is a fact that women should be educated. If we like we can go further up this progression, which I call Ramsey's ladder: it is true that it is a fact ...; it is really true that it is a fact ... (Blackburn, 1999, p.217)

yet denies that they are representational: 'moral opinion is not in the business of representing the world' (1999, p.214). Though Blackburn no longer rejects ethical representation (see e.g. Blackburn 2015, p.81), this shows how NRPs may adopt different attitudes towards different notions. A good characterisation of NRP must be sensitive to this. As a result, we should understand the distinctive stances NRPs take towards notions like representation and truth – stances I've so far lumped together as 'suspicion' – as ones you can take towards some of these notions but not others.

Given these two issues, the rest of the chapter proceeds as follows. In §2.2 I discuss the kinds of features under suspicion, and introduce the three main claims NRPs make about them. I call these claims *rejection*, *qualified rejection*, and *explanatory scepticism*. The final view, that representational features have no role in explaining the target language, is the most important for contemporary NRP, so in §§2.3-2.5 I give a thorough account of it and show how my account applies to extant NRP views. After doing that in §2.6 I discuss rejection and qualified rejection, explaining the often used but seldom explained terminology of 'minimal' and 'robust' representational features, and showing how these two claims fit in with explanatory scepticism.

2.2 Representational features

So far I've talked about NRP's suspicion of notions like truth, representation, belief, and so on. To get a full picture of the view we need to know

exactly which notions are included. It's convenient to give these a name, so I'll pick 'representational features'. This is just for convenience. But what are these features like, and are they linked in some way?

I won't give necessary and sufficient conditions for being a representational feature. Partly this is because NRPs haven't done so. Partly it is because later in this thesis, debates will turn on which features count as representational, and it's more convenient to discuss this issue when it becomes relevant then. Instead I'll give a brief survey of the kinds of features included, and say what links them.

So far we've seen notions like truth, belief, representation and description. Here's a list of these plus others that have been discussed:¹

- x has truth-conditions/is truth-apt
- x expresses a proposition
- x makes a statement/an assertion
- x expresses a judgement/belief
- x is factual
- x refers to something/is referential
- x is true of/is satisfied by something
- x denotes/stands for something
- x represents something (as being some way)
- x represents a fact/the facts/the world/what exists/what's 'out there'
- x is representational
- x describes the world/is descriptive

These do seem to be linked at least loosely, and in a way that makes them deserve to be called 'representational'.

First, the majority of them concern some kind of relation between linguistic things like words and sentences, and the things they are putatively *about*, for instance between a referring term and its referent. Huw Price, who along with other philosophers like Robert Brandom has made words like 'representationalism' and 'non-representationalism' popular in describing theories like these, seems to have this idea in mind when he describes 'representationalism' as the view 'that the *linguistic* items in question 'stand for' or 'represent' something *non-linguistic*' (2013, p.10).

¹ Some of these are to be found in Robert Kraut's list of properties (Kraut, 1990, p.159). Others can be found in the literature cited in the rest of this chapter.

Second, at least some of these properties are the kind found in a Tarskian theory of truth for a language – reference, satisfaction, and truth. This is interesting since many philosophers are interested in these theories, and some think they can be used to give theories of meaning for languages.²

Third, many of these properties come as a package: something cannot have one without having certain others. Consider the sentence ‘grass is green’. This claim seems to have propositional content: roughly, it makes sense to embed it in a ‘that’-clause. On one *deflationist* or *minimalist* view, the sentence thereby trivially counts as having a host of representational features. It expresses a proposition, namely ⟨grass is green⟩, it describes and represents grass as being green, it can be used to assert or state that grass is green, we can believe it, and if grass is green then it states a fact, and correctly represents the world. All these trivially follow. We can also say that its components have representational features: ‘grass’ and ‘green’ denote objects and properties, represent the world, and so on. NRPs are typically deflationists about many, if not all, representational features, and will therefore take these features as a package deal.

So, we have a rough list of the features of which NRPs are suspicious. What do they say about these features, with regard to their chosen area of language? Let’s call an area of language a *discourse* for simplicity. As far as I can see there are three views which NRPs take regarding some given representational feature F and a particular discourse:

Rejection The terms don’t have F.

Qualified Rejection The terms have F in one sense but not another.

Explanatory Scepticism The best explanation of the terms doesn’t require ascribing F to them.

Rejection is the favourite of old-style emotivists about ethical language, as we saw in the previous chapter. Contemporary NRP mainly involves qualified rejection and explanatory scepticism, and eschews outright rejection. For instance, as we’ve seen, Blackburn and Gibbard no longer reject representational features in the case of ethical language.

We can use these three claims to define the core of non-representationalism. In my view, to count as a non-representational pragmatist at the very

² See e.g. Davidson (1967).

least you must take up explanatory scepticism. You must believe that the terms in your chosen discourse are not explained by any representational features. Explanatory scepticism is the core of contemporary NRP. Most of the rest of this chapter is focused on making sense of this view. After doing this, I'll discuss the place of rejection and qualified rejection.

2.3 Explanatory scepticism

Explanatory scepticism is the view that certain features of the terms in question are not explained by representational features. This explanatory view is increasingly popular among NRPs:

Where pragmatism is distinctive is in holding that representation is nevertheless not the key concept to deploy when the desire for philosophical explanation of our practice in some area is upon us. It is not the way to understand the kind of thought or the part of language in question, whereas a different focus on the function of terms in the lives of thinkers and talkers, is the better option. (Blackburn, 2015, p.851)

Whereas standard 'representationalist' views invoke substantial notions of denotation and the like to explain the workings of thinking and language, expressivists treat representation by deflation. [i.e. in a way which excludes it from having an explanatory role] (Gibbard, 2015, p.211)

I am not proposing merely that genuine representation turns out to be a linguistic function that is not in play in our own language, but that representation ... is a theoretical category we should dispense with altogether. The right thing to do, as theorists ... is to stop talking about representation altogether, to abandon the project of theorising about word-world relations in these terms (Price, 2011, p.10)

In all three of these passages we see the idea that representation and the like play no role in some kind of explanation of our language. This idea is prominent elsewhere too.³

³ See e.g. Gross et al. (2015, p.6), Price (2004, p.209), Price & O'Leary-Hawthorne (1996, p.115), Blackburn (2010b, p.172), Williams (2013, p.128), Chrisman (2011), Dreier (2004), Ridge (2014, pp.103ff), and Toppinen (2015).

The idea in the above quotations is that representational features have no role to play in *explaining* the terms of the discourse. Explaining these terms doesn't require treating them as representational – as ascribing representational features to them. To understand this view, we need to know what it is to *explain* a term. The idea of an explanation of a term or discourse is particular to non-representationalism, so we shouldn't expect it to match any natural pretheoretical notion. In explaining it I will leave some concepts, including meaning and explanation, open to limited interpretation in order to allow NRPs to disagree with each other over details. To compensate for the resulting general and abstract account of explanatory scepticism, I'll then show how this account can be applied to several extant NRP views.

Looking at the literature, an explanation of a discourse seems to have two parts: saying what the terms in question 'do', and saying *why* we have terms that 'do' this. Ethical expressivism gives us a simple example which will be our template: *What do ethical terms 'do'?* They express attitudes, which aren't fundamentally like beliefs. *Why are they there?* Because it is useful to have terms which express attitudes.

The best statement of this two-part view comes from Blackburn's definition of 'pragmatism':

You will be a pragmatist about an area of discourse if you pose a ... question: how does it come about that we go in for this kind of discourse and thought? What is the explanation of this bit of our language game? And then you offer an account of what we are up to in going in for this discourse, and the account eschews any use of the referring expressions of the discourse; any appeal to anything that a Quinean would identify as the values of the bound variables if the discourse is regimented; or any semantic or ontological attempt to 'interpret' the discourse in a domain, to find referents for its terms, or truth makers for its sentences ... Instead the explanation proceeds by talking in different terms of what is done by so talking. It offers a revelatory genealogy or anthropology or even a just-so story about how this mode of talking and thinking and practising might come about, given in terms of the functions it serves. (Blackburn, 2013, p.75)

Here, 'an account of what we are up to', of 'what is done by so talking' is the

‘what it does’ component. The question ‘how does it come about that we go in for this kind of discourse and thought?’ is the ‘why it’s there’ question. The kinds of answer Blackburn wants to eschew involve representational features (reference, truth, and so on). The focus on ‘what is done’ by using these terms partly explains why people call NRP views ‘pragmatist’.

This two-part idea can be found elsewhere:

The challenge [for the NRP] is now simply to explain in naturalistic terms how creatures like us come to talk in these various ways. This is a matter of explaining what role the different language games play in our lives – what differences there are between the functions of talk of value and the functions of talk of electrons, for example. (Price, 2013, p.20)

Here Price’s talk of ‘function’ and ‘role’ points at both ‘what it does’ and ‘why it’s there’ theories (we will return to the idea of a function in a moment). Gibbard describes part of his project like so:

... from a basis that excludes normative facts and treats humanity as part of the natural world, I explain why we would have normative concepts that act much as normative realist proclaim. (Gibbard, 2003, p.xii)

Michael Williams offers what he calls an ‘EMU’, an explanation of meaning in terms of use. An EMU provides a ‘what it does’ explanation in terms of use patterns of language, and a ‘why it’s there’ explanation as to why we have terms with those use patterns (2013, pp.134ff).

The goal of offering a two-part theory like this is distinctive of NRPs. Their focus on explaining a discourse differs from other theories which ask questions about the subject matter of that discourse. While NRPs focus on saying why we have ethical language, other kinds of theories may say what ethical facts and properties are like. Theories like this are often simply labelled ‘metaphysics’ by NRPs, who take their view to be in some way anti-metaphysical. In the second part of this thesis I ask whether NRP is really opposed to metaphysics, and there the role of the two-part NRP theory becomes extremely important.

Given the two-part idea, we should read explanatory scepticism as the view that the best explanation of what the terms of the discourse do, and why we have terms which do this, does not involve treating those terms as

representational, i.e. as having representational features. But what does this mean?

First, it's clear that not every feature of a word is relevant to what it *does*. 'Good' has four letters, but having four letters isn't what it does. It has a particular etymology, but studying its etymology isn't studying what it does. Moreover it's not clear how to narrow the field of relevant features. It's not what is distinctive of the word – 'good' is distinctive in its appearance in great works of moral philosophy, but this isn't what it does either.

One suggestion is to say what a term does by saying what state of mind it is used to express. This is the expressivist route.⁴ Explanatory scepticism is then the view that we can say what states of mind the target language expresses without treating it as representational. However, this route ignores inferentialists like Brandom (2008) and Matthew Chrisman (2011) who often describe themselves as pragmatists, or as opposed to representationalism, yet don't focus on the expression of mental states. Instead they take a language-focused inferentialist approach, and focus on the rules for using language – when speakers are permitted or required to assert or deny sentences. They may say these rules can be specified without representational features. We need to include such views, and the expressivist route rules them out.

To avoid these problems, I suggest we follow Jamie Dreier's (2004) lead, and build explanation into the notion of what the discourse does from the start. On this reading, to say what a term *t* does is to specify the property or properties of *t* which explain some of its important features. But which features? On Dreier's view, the feature to be explained is the *meaning* of the term, or more precisely *the fact that it means what it does*. To say what a term does, then, is to specify the features it has which explain why it means what it does.

I want to expand this to include facts about use, since as we'll see later some NRPs may want to talk about use rather than meaning. As such, on this reading, to say what a term does is to specify the properties it has which explain the fact that it has the meaning it does, and/or the fact that it is used as it is. Explanatory scepticism involves saying that the best explanation of the meaning and/or use of the term doesn't require treating it as repres-

⁴ Indeed Gibbard (2015) takes 'expressivism' just to apply to theories like this. In this he differs from others who would call such a theory a Gricean or psychologistic theory of meaning, and reserve 'expressivism' for the view that the relevant states of mind are unlike beliefs.

entational. Roughly, it's the view that the term may have representational features, but it's not *because* it has these features that it means what it does, or is used as it is.

This is an appealing interpretation. Most importantly, NRPs can consistently accept this view yet maintain that the terms in question do have representational features. It's not that the terms lack these features, only that we don't need to mention that they have them in order to explain their meaning or use. Moreover, so far there is room for NRPs to interpret the three crucial notions – explanation, meaning and use – as they like. This allows some disagreement, as we'll see when we apply the account.

Given the discussion of the 'what it does' component, it's straightforward to interpret the 'why it's there' component. It says why humans have terms which do what these terms do, i.e. to say why humans have words with the features specified in the 'what it does' explanation. For example, expressivists will want to say why humans use terms which express attitudes, and they may do this by saying that having words like this enables disagreement and deliberation about how to act, and is therefore very practically beneficial. The correct answer to the 'why it's there' question depends on the answer to the 'what it does' question.

This focus on 'why it's there' allows us to make sense of non-representationalists' use of the word 'function'. If we follow the notion of function defended by Wright (1973), the function of a word is the feature it has which explains why it's there. So we can see the idea that giving a 'what it does and why it's there' theory of a word will specify its function, since it gives an aetiological explanation of why we have a word with the role specified in the 'what it does' component.

We can now summarise explanatory scepticism in its general form:

(ES) The best explanation of (i) the meaning and/or use of the relevant terms (e.g. ethical terms) and (ii) why humans have terms with the features that explain their meaning and/or use doesn't require treating those terms as representational

From now on, I'll talk about an explanation of 'what it does and why it's there' as an *explanation of the discourse* or term. This is just a stipulation – I'll use different names for any other theories which might deserve this one. Next I will explore several specific applications of ES, to show how it neatly matches actual NRP theories. I will also make some general comments

about what notions of meaning and explanation are suitable for NRPs to use.

2.4 Applying explanatory scepticism

We can now put (ES) to work by applying it to NRP views. I'll apply it to ethical expressivism and then widen the application to include other NRP views including Horwich's deflationism about truth.

2.4.1 Ethical expressivism

Applying the 'what it does' component, we can read expressivists as saying that the best explanation of the meaning and/or use of ethical terms doesn't require treating them as representational. In my view, the best interpretation of 'explanation of the meaning' here is given by Dreier (2004, p.35), who takes it to mean a constitutive explanation of the meaning of ethical terms. In other words, this is to say what it is in virtue of which ethical terms mean what they do. Applying the idea, we get:

The best theory of what constitutes the fact that ethical terms mean what they do does not require treating those terms as representational

This is expressivism's explanatory scepticism about what ethical language 'does'.

On this reading, therefore, to explain the discourse involves first saying what constitutes the fact that ethical terms mean what they do. Giving a theory like this for ethical terms will involve filling in the blanks in claims like

1. Sentence *s* means something ethical in virtue of —————
2. Word *w* means *good* in virtue of —————
3. Sentence *s* means *torture is wrong* in virtue of —————

To fill in the blanks will involve saying what *constitutes* a term's having a distinctive ethical meaning. There's no need to go too deeply into the notion of constitution here, since this is just an illustration. However we can say that at the very least the notion is an explanatory one – a fact or property should explain or illuminate the fact or property that it constitutes,

in some sense. Later I'll say more about which notions of explanation are appropriate for NRP in general.

Given this framework, explanatory scepticism will involve saying that whatever fills in the blanks in the statements above, it will not involve ascribing any representational features to the terms in question. So even if NRPs accept that 'wrong' *refers to* wrongness (where reference is a representational feature), or that 'wrong' expresses beliefs which attribute wrongness to things, they will also say that it's not in virtue of having these properties that 'wrong' means *wrong*. And crucially, accepting that something has a property is compatible with denying that the property has a given explanatory role, so explanatory scepticism does not entail rejection.

There is good evidence that this reading makes sense of expressivism. It makes sense because NRP theories are clearly after an account of *what it is* to make an ethical (or modal, or causal, or ...) assertion. For instance here's Gibbard:

The idea is to *explain the meaning* of the word via explaining the states of mind that *constitute* believing things couched with the term (Gibbard, 2015, p.212, emphasis added)

We can also see this in Blackburn when he talks about the question of 'what makes a practice a moral practice' (2015, p.845), i.e. what makes our use of ethical sentences count as expressing *ethical* meaning rather than something else. There are other endorsements of this idea in the literature.⁵

In other words, expressivists are interested in *what it is* to say something which has ethical content. Such an account is rightly read as an account of what constitutes ethical content. In fact, expressivists go so far as to make claims about what an ethical mental state *is*:

To hold a value, then, is typically to have a relatively stable disposition to conduct practical life and practical discussion in a particular way: it is to be disposed or *set* in that way, and notably to be set against change in this respect (Blackburn, 1998, p.67).

Here Blackburn is saying what it is to hold a value, i.e. to have an ethical belief. Expressivists then supplement this with a psychologistic view that

⁵ See: Blackburn (1993, p.19), Gibbard (2003, pp.6-7), Gibbard (2013, pp.219f) Chrisman (2011), Ridge (2014, p.103ff), Williams (2013), Brandom (2013, p.86).

the meaning of ethical sentences consists in their expressing these mental states. Expressivism therefore clearly provides an answer to the ‘in virtue of’ questions:

4. Sentence *s* means something ethical in virtue of being used to express a practical attitude of a certain kind
5. Word *w* means *good* in virtue of the fact that *w* expresses a positive practical attitude or plan
6. Sentence *s* means *torture is wrong* in virtue of expressing disapproval of torture, or a plan involving avoiding torturing.

Since expressivism’s positive theory of what ethical language does neatly fits this template, there’s good reason to read its negative claim about representational features in this way too.

We can also use this to make sense of other NRP theories about ethical language. We can read an ethical inferentialist like Chrisman as saying something like:

7. The English word ‘good’ means *good* in virtue of the fact that certain inferences involving ‘good’ are required or permitted in English.

We can also read rival theories like naturalist and non-naturalist metaethical realism in this way:

8. The English word ‘good’ means *good* in virtue of describing objects as having the *sui generis* property goodness.
9. The English word ‘good’ means *good* in virtue of describing objects as having the natural property goodness.

These two claims give an explanatory role to *description* and as such are representationalist views.

Filling in (ES) in this way will also generalise to NRP theories of other discourses. For instance we can fill in NRP claims about causation and modality. Blackburn’s Humean expressivism about causation takes causal language to express inferential dispositions, for instance the disposition to expect the billiard ball to move when one sees another ball has strike it. We can fill this in, albeit in quite general terms, like so:

10. 'cause' means *cause* in virtue of the fact that it expresses inferential dispositions, for instance to infer the existence of the effect from the existence of the cause (Blackburn, 1990a)

Thomasson argues that modal claims make explicit rules of language use. In this way they are like the statements of the rules of a board game written on the box. For instance, 'necessarily all bachelors are men' makes explicit that the rules of use for 'bachelor' and 'man' permit speakers to apply the former only when the latter is permitted. It is somewhat like a rule that says: apply 'bachelor' only when you can also apply 'man'. As such we can formulate Thomasson's view more generally:

11. 'necessarily' means *necessarily* in virtue of the fact that it makes linguistic rules explicit. (Thomasson, 2007)

These are positive pragmatist claims saying what does constitute the relevant terms' meaning, rather than negative claims saying what doesn't. But this still illustrates the usefulness of reading the 'what it does' component in terms of constitution of meaning.

We've seen how to understand what expressivists say about what ethical language 'does'. Next we can look at the 'why it's there' component. On this reading (ES) says that the best explanation of why humans have terms with the meaning constituting properties of ethical terms doesn't require treating those terms as representational. Expressivists think that ethical terms express attitudes of some kind, and this claim says that we can explain why humans have terms which express attitudes without treating those terms as representational.

To support this, expressivists argue that humans can cooperate and collectively decide what to do if they can share and dispute their practical states. The ability to do this is crucial for successful collective action and so survival. Expressivists argue that this is most effectively achieved by having language which allows us to share, disagree and hypothesise about our states. But this is just what ethical language allows us to do. So according to expressivists, there is a clear explanation of why humans have a language which does what the expressivist takes it to do. And at no point did it require attributing representational features to ethical language.⁶ It's important to note that isn't intended to be a conclusive and comprehensive

⁶ See Blackburn (1988) for an account like this.

account, but as a proof of concept – to make it plausible that there is such an account which does not treat ethical terms as representational.

In sum, ethical expressivists' explanatory scepticism is the claim that ethical terms have their meaning in virtue of expressing attitudes which contrast with belief, rather than in virtue of having representational features, and that the best explanation of why humans have terms which express attitudes needn't involve ascribing such features to them.

2.4.2 Other applications

Filling in (ES) in terms of meaning and constitution isn't the only option. A pragmatist might be sceptical about meaning and meaning facts or properties.⁷ Perhaps meaning is too indeterminate, or simply doesn't form an interesting unified category for philosophical study. (Perhaps she thinks that the notion of meaning is no clearer than the notion of what a word 'does'.) In such a case, she might disregard meaning properties and replace them with the overall usage facts about the terms, i.e. all the facts about the circumstances in which they are uttered. This corresponds to the appearance of 'use' in my characterisation of ES. Her claim would then be that the representational features of 'good' aren't among those which explain the overall usage of the word. She may then want to read 'explain' in causal-historical terms. On this reading, we can give an explanation of the laws which explain why the term 'good' is used in the way it is, without mentioning representational features at all.

Interestingly, one prominent non-representationalist – Paul Horwich – has views on which this reading comes to more or less the same as the meaning and constitution reading. Horwich believes that whatever underlying property constitutes a term's meaning what it does, that underlying property must explain the overall use of the term (Horwich, 1998a, p.45). In other words, because of his view about constitution and meaning, he thinks that

x's having F constitutes x's meaning what it does

just is

x's having F explains x's overall use

⁷ Thanks to Huw Price for this point and for suggesting the positive view in this paragraph.

Therefore for Horwich, the first reading of the ‘what it does’ theory comes to much the same thing as the second. Whether this interesting entailment holds for other pragmatists who take the meaning and constitution reading depends on how they understand constitution and meaning, since it’s Horwich’s particular view about these notions that leads to this result.

Indeed Horwich’s own deflationary theory of truth follows the two-part ‘what it does and why it’s there’ pattern (Horwich, 1998b). Horwich first claims that the meaning of the truth predicate ‘x is true’ is constituted by our disposition to infer according to the T-schema:

(T) $\langle p \rangle$ is true iff p

where ‘ $\langle p \rangle$ ’ abbreviates ‘the proposition that p ’. According to Horwich, this means that our disposition to infer according to this schema is what gives the most basic explanation of our use of the predicate ‘x is true’. This doesn’t require ascribing any representational features to ‘x is true’, like referring to or denoting the truths or truth, or representing x as true. So Horwich is giving an NRP answer to the ‘what it does’ question about the truth-predicate.

Horwich then goes on to answer the ‘why it’s there’ question (1998b, pp.2ff). He argues that we use the truth predicate because it gives us expressive power we couldn’t easily get without it. The truth predicate allows us to assert claims whose content we don’t know, or collections of claims too numerous to list. For instance, if I want to agree with Ella’s funniest remark I can say ‘Ella’s funniest remark is true’ even if I don’t know what they said. The truth predicate also lets me make quantified claims like ‘For any proposition x , x is true iff the double negation of x is true’. Horwich takes this to explain why we have a truth-predicate whose meaning is constituted in a non-representational way. Horwich’s view clearly exhibits the two-part structure I’ve outlined.

2.5 Explanation

So far we’ve seen several different ways of interpreting explanatory scepticism – of filling in the gaps in ES. However we might wonder in general how to understand the notion of explanation used here. In fact there isn’t a philosophical consensus on what explanation is, or whether it is a univocal notion. There are different kinds of explanation and different theories of each, for instance scientific explanation, causal explanation, constitutive

explanation, metaphysical explanation. And there is no agreed logic for explanation, though most would agree on certain principles, for instance that explanation is not truth-functional and not monotonic.

As such I don't think we should aim to understand all non-representationalists as being concerned with the same kind of explanation. As we saw above, Dreier is interested in a constitutive notion of explanation, while Price is interested in a causal-historical kind, and Horwich is interested in both, which more or less come to the same thing for him. Dreier mentions the notion of an 'illuminating' explanation, and this is reflected in Blackburn's use of Wittgenstein's idea of a 'übersichtliche Darstellung' – a 'perspicuous representation' – of an area of our language and thought. Blackburn doesn't give a full theory of what this means, but we can understand the rough idea. In particular, in the case of ethics, Blackburn thinks it is more perspicuous to understand ethical commitments as practical attitudes rather than saying that they represent things as having ethical features. I think Dreier would say such an explanation is more illuminating. This is rough, but it is enough to see what non-representationalists are after.

However, there's another crucial point about explanation. Sometimes it's convenient to talk about *explaining meaning*: 'expressivists try to explain the meaning of ethical language', 'representational features do not explain the meaning of causal language', and so on. We saw an example of this in the quote from Gibbard on p.33. This phrase is ambiguous. I can explain the meaning of a word in one sense by giving a constitutive explanation of the fact that it means what it does, or perhaps by giving a causal-historical explanation of the fact that it has the properties which constitute this fact. Or, crucially, I can explain its meaning by telling you that it means *dog*. The first is explanation as constitutive (or causal) explanation, the second is explanation as *specifying* or *telling*. These kinds of explanation are independent. I can tell you that in John Le Carré's slang, 'babysitter' means *bodyguard*, without telling you what makes this so, or what caused it to be so. You can tell me that 'the Circus' means whatever it does in virtue of being used in a certain way by Le Carré, or that he chose that word for various reasons, without telling me what that word means.

As I've outlined it, explanatory scepticism does not concern explaining as telling or specifying. This means that it is absolutely *not* the view that you cannot use an ascription of a representational property to specify the meaning of a term. For example, it may be perfectly reasonable to tell

someone what ‘babysitter’ means by saying that it is true of all and only bodyguards. The same goes for ethical language. Nor does NRP aim to fill in the blanks in sentences like:

12. The sentence ‘torture is wrong’ means —————

with any kind of expressivist or NRP claim. The expressivist doesn’t say that when I utter ‘torture is wrong’ what I *mean* is that I have a particular attitude. Non-representationalists aren’t out to say what ethical sentences mean, but to say what their meaning consists in (or what explains their use). To use the jargon, NRP is not a *semantic* theory, telling us what sentences mean, but a *metasemantic* theory, saying what makes them have the meaning they do. Of course, the NRP can go for the semantic claim too if she wants – but it’s wrong to read NRP as essentially making the semantic claim, since it doesn’t match what NRPs actually say.

In particular, this means that NRPs can accept semantic theories which ascribe representational features in order to yield a theory which specifies the meanings of various sentences. Such a theory might have axioms like

13. Term *t* refers to torture

14. Predicate *f* denotes the set $\{x \mid x \text{ is wrong}\}$

15. A sentence featuring just a predicate and a singular term is true if and only if the object to which the singular term refers is a member of the set which the predicate denotes.

which entail theorems which specify the meaning of sentences by giving their truth-conditions

16. The sentence $f(t)$ is true if and only if torture is in the set $\{x \mid x \text{ is wrong}\}$, i.e. if and only if torture is wrong.

The non-representationalist can accept that some sentences like this are true, and may be used to explain the meaning of a sentence in the second sense – to specify it. But this doesn’t entail that they explain the meaning in the first sense. The claim ‘*f* denotes the set $\{x \mid x \text{ is wrong}\}$ ’ may be true yet not explain the claim ‘*f* means *wrong*’, as we saw above. So pragmatists do not intend to conflict with semantic theories like this, though it’s controversial whether they can actually avoid this conflict in the end.⁸

⁸ See Price (2004); Horwich (1998a, p.52) and the discussion in Horisk (2007); Gross et al. (2015); Burgess (2011); Williams (1999).

2.6 Rejection and qualified rejection

This concludes my discussion of explanatory scepticism. However there are two other views that NRPs take: rejection and qualified rejection. Rejection is straightforward: it's that the language in question lacks the relevant representational feature. Rejection was the primary view of emotivists like Ayer and of expressivists like Blackburn and Gibbard in their earlier work. As we saw in Chapter 1, Ayer simply denied that ethical sentences were true or false, and Blackburn and Gibbard followed this in their earlier work. However rejection is no longer common.

However it's important to note that many critics have a tendency to read NRP as primarily or even *essentially* adopting rejection toward all representational features.⁹ Call this reading the *rejection reading*. This reading in fact seems to be orthodox among critics, and there is a question about whether it's a good reading of the literature. But it doesn't really matter for my purposes. Instead I rule out the rejection reading by fiat: I am not interested in positions for which the rejection reading would be correct. I believe that Blackburn and Gibbard's positions in particular are not correctly characterised by that reading, but if you disagree then instead simply read me as discussing a possible position one could extract from the work of Blackburn, Gibbard, and the other writers I have mentioned.

This point is extremely important, for some arguments concerning NRP may simply be irrelevant when we adopt the understanding I've suggested. For suppose such an argument involves the premise that NRPs believe that the relevant sentences do not have truth-conditions. Given my reading of the view, this premise would be false, and any argument based on it would be unsound. When assessing NRP we must be aware of this, and also of the persistence of the rejection reading. However, we must also be aware that many arguments against it may not be vulnerable in this way, because they are best read as arguing that NRP ends up *entailing* rejection itself. Arguments like this do not involve the rejection reading; they argue that NRPs end up with rejection whether or not they want it.

However, as I said in Chapter 1, in this thesis I am assuming that NRP is successful insofar as it overcomes the three objections I outlined. This is

⁹ Some relatively recent examples: Parfit (2011, vol. 2, pp.378ff), Suikkanen (2009, p.365), Jackson et al. (1994, p.287), Divers & Miller (1994, p.13), Smith (1994, p.3), Jackson (1999, p.422), Jackson & Pettit (1998, p.239), Brink (1989, p.18–19), Blome-Tillmann (2009), Cuneo (2006, p.37).

because I'm interested in NRP's impact and overall interest *if* it succeeds on its own terms. I shall therefore not discuss arguments which say that NRP entails or involves rejection, because NRPs will count their view as unsuccessful on their own terms if those arguments are right. This is not to say that such arguments aren't right, just that I'm not interested in them for the purposes of this thesis. From here on, then, we should not read NRP as essentially or even primarily rejecting the relevant notions.

Qualified rejection is a lot more common in the work of contemporary non-representationalists. Qualified rejection is the view that the terms in question have the relevant representational feature in one sense but lack it in others. Consider for example ethical expressivists' views about belief. Early ethical expressivists denied that ethical states of minds are beliefs because of their views about the motivational power of ethical commitments. According to expressivists, ethical states of mind are intrinsically motivating, but ordinary beliefs are not (see Blackburn 1984, pp.187-189). My belief that the pub is open does not by itself motivate me to act. How I act on this belief depends on my desires – whether I want a beer, to avoid the landlady, or something else. This is sometimes called a *Humean* account of belief.

Expressivists think that ethical states of mind are not Humean beliefs, because they are intrinsically motivating. If I have an ethical commitment, say that the pub is an immoral place, this by itself will motivate me to act in certain ways, like to avoid the pub and encourage others to do so too. Early expressivists took 'belief' simply to mean 'Humean belief', and as such denied that ethical states of mind are beliefs at all.

However, expressivists' views have changed. Instead of thinking that *no* beliefs are intrinsically motivating, they now think that *not all* beliefs are intrinsically motivating. This allows ethical states of mind to count as beliefs. In particular expressivists may accept the view that any assertoric sentence expresses a belief:

... For there is nothing to prevent a theorist from allowing a promiscuous, catholic, universal notion of 'belief' —one that simply tags along with assertion, acceptance or commitment (Blackburn, 2010b, p.4)

Expressivists now tend to think that ethical mental states are *not* Humean beliefs, but nevertheless are beliefs. They therefore deny that ethical terms express beliefs in one sense, but they accept it in another.

This view is a qualified rejection of representational features. Qualified rejection is possible because there are often different ways of understanding representational notions, as we just saw with belief. It's important to recognise the possibility of qualified rejection, because sometimes it may be unclear whether a pragmatist is rejecting a representational feature outright (as Ayer does) or whether she is making a more subtle qualified rejection. Misunderstanding on this point may lead to irrelevant criticisms of NRP. Moreover an NRP may well sign up for qualified rejection but label it as outright rejection. For instance, she may understand belief in a Humean way, and as such say that ethical language does not express beliefs, and not qualify that claim. However she may at the same time accept that ethical mental states have truth-conditions, and are truth-apt, and so on. This kind of view is essentially qualified rejection, just not explicitly recognised as such. It's inevitable that qualified rejection will present itself in this form, because different pragmatists may simply have different views about what representational features are like.

What are the different conceptions of representational features which NRPs accept and reject? Often qualified rejection is stated using words like 'thin' and 'minimal' to describe the representational features the terms have, and 'robust' and 'substantial' to describe those they lack. For instance here's James Lenman:

Thus the Expressivist might say that moral sentences are truth-apt in that they have *deflationary* truth conditions but they lack *inflationary* truth conditions; or that they are *minimally* but not *robustly* truth-apt; or that moral assertions do not belong to some full-blooded category of *assertions proper* but to a wider class of *quasi-assertions*. (Lenman, 2003, p.33, original emphasis)

Neil Sinclair applies this idea to beliefs, saying that expressivism 'can be understood as claiming that moral sentences in their sincere assertoric uses do not express *robust* beliefs' which are to be distinguished from *minimal* beliefs (Sinclair, 2006, p.253). Distinctions of this kind can also be found elsewhere.¹⁰ One general way of describing qualified rejection is to say that it is the view that the relevant representational feature applies in a thin or minimal sense but not a robust sense.

¹⁰ See e.g. Williams (2013, pp.130-131) Price & O'Leary-Hawthorne (1996, *passim*), Macarthur & Price (2007, p.240), (Blackburn, 1999, p.217), Price (2013, p.24), van Roojen (2014).

Critics have complained that NRPs' use of terms like 'robust' and 'minimal' is obscure. Consider for instance John MacFarlane's discussion of Huw Price's (2013). MacFarlane claims that 'it is not entirely clear what counts as a "substantial word-world semantic relation"' (for Price, 'word-world semantic relation' just means 'representational feature'):

... It does not help that Price tends to characterize representationalism using words like "stand for" or "represent" in scare quotes, or phrases like "substantive semantic relation," whose meanings aren't any clearer than "representationalism" itself. (There is so little explicit attention to this issue in the lectures and commentaries that I sometimes felt like an imposter: *if you have to ask, you shouldn't be here!*) (MacFarlane, 2014, p.4)

I think MacFarlane's point is reasonable; these terms are frequently used with little explanation. It doesn't help that different NRPs use them differently. However, it would be pessimistic and uncharitable to disregard NRP over this issue. For there are several different distinctions in play among NRPs, each of which can be explained clearly.

Let's start with the 'minimal' sense in which NRPs think representational features do apply. NRPs accept whatever features of language and thought trivially follow from the fact that the terms they're interested in have propositional content. Roughly, if we can say that an ethical sentence like 'torture is wrong' has propositional content, i.e. says *that* p for some p, then we can say that it is truth-apt, expresses beliefs, makes assertions or statements, aims to state facts and describe the world, and so on. The whole suite of representational features follows simply from its having propositional content. A good example of this is in Blackburn's view about truth, expressed using the metaphor of Ramsey's ladder

Because of minimalism we can have for free what look[s] like a ladder of philosophical ascent: 'p', 'it is true that p', 'it is really and truly a fact that p' ..., for none of these terms, in Ramsey's view, marks an addition to the original judgement. You can as easily make the last judgement as the first—Ramsey's ladder is lying on the ground, horizontal. (Blackburn, 1998, p.78)

Blackburn then goes on to apply this to other representational features:¹¹

¹¹ See also (Blackburn, 2010b, p.4) on representation, description and belief, cited above.

Minimalism seems to let us end up saying, for instance, that ‘kindness is good’ represents the facts. For ‘represents the facts’ means no more than: ‘is true’. ... The ethical proposition is what it is and not another thing; its truth means that it represents the ethical facts or the ethical properties of things. We can throw in mention of reality: ethical propositions are really true. Since we already have a sketch of a minimalist theory of ethical cognition ... we might even find ourselves saying that we know moral propositions to be true. Or, really true, or really factually true, or really in accord with the eternal harmonies and verities that govern the universe, if we like that kind of talk. ... Just *because* of minimalism about truth and representation, there is no objection to tossing them in for free, at the end. (Blackburn, 1998, pp.79-80)

We can also see this in Gibbard:

Suppose instead that minimalists are right for truth, for facts, and for belief: there is no more to claiming “It’s true that pain is bad” than to claim that pain is bad; the fact that pain is bad just consists in pain’s being bad; to believe that pain is bad is just to accept that it is. Then it’s true that pain is bad and it’s a fact that pain is bad—so long as, indeed, pain is bad. I genuinely believe that pain is bad, and my expressivistic theory, filled out, explains what believing this consists in. (Gibbard, 2003, pp.182-3)

Here Gibbard is talking about the idea that belief truth and facts trivially follow in the case of ethical language – after the expressivist explanation of ethical mental states is complete.

This doesn’t mean that it is trivial whether a given group of sentences have propositional content. Expressivists justify their view that ethical sentences have propositional content, for instance by appealing to notions like disagreement (Gibbard, 2003, pp.65ff). However, they will think that all the representational features follow trivially from this. *If* ‘torture is wrong’ means *torture is wrong*, then it expresses the proposition ⟨torture is wrong⟩, represents torture as being wrong, ascribes the property wrongness to torture, and so on. There is nothing more to representing torture as being wrong than meaning *torture is wrong*; more generally any sentence which means *b is F* represents b as being F. This is what NRPs mean when they

say that their chosen terms have representational features in a *minimal* sense. We can then see ‘robust’ as marking out those features that terms and sentences can only have if they satisfy more than these minimal requirements.

What requirements? What marks out representational features as ‘robust’, ‘substantial’, ‘thick’ ones? As far as I can see the most prominent use of these terms is to mark out explanatory scepticism, which we’ve already discussed at length. However, note that with explanatory scepticism there is no distinction made between robust and non-robust kinds of representational features, but instead a distinction between the uses to which representational features are put. It’s not very accurate to say that NRPs deny robust representational features; it’s more accurate to say that they refuse to use them robustly, in explaining the target discourse. And indeed it’s far simpler to say that they deny that such features help explain the discourse, doing away with the term ‘robust’ altogether. It’s easy to see how explanatory scepticism pairs with a view of representational features as minimal in the above sense: if representational features are mere trivial entailments of propositional content, they won’t play any role in explaining it.

Aside from the explanatory one I can see three other uses in the literature. The first is between environmental and non-environmental representation, with environmental representation usually being counted as the ‘robust’ kind. Environmental representation is, roughly, a causal tracking relation between a term and features of the speaker’s environment. For instance we may think of a word like ‘tree’ as environmentally representational because it is causally sensitive to the presence of trees in speakers’ environments. Here are Blackburn and Price on the environmental notion:

Environmental representation is essentially a matter of causal covariation. It can be thought of by comparing ourselves with the instruments we build to covary with environmental states: petrol gauges, voltmeters, windsocks, and so forth. (Blackburn, 2010b, p.10)

In these cases, the crucial idea is that some feature of the representing system either does, or is (in some sense) ‘intended to’, vary in parallel with some feature of the represented system. ... In biological cases, for example, this notion gives priority to the idea that the function of a representation is to co-vary with

some (typically) *external* environmental condition: it puts the system-world link on the front foot. (Price, 2013, p.36)

A term environmentally represents, or represents its environment, if it bears some kind of relation of co-variation with the speaker's external environment. Ethical expressivists deny that ethical terms represent their environment in this sense: they don't track features of the environment. However, they will still say that ethical terms represent in the more minimal sense described above.

Discussion of environmental representation has been more popular in recent years as issues concerning global expressivism have come to the fore (see Chapter 4). Huw Price has used the notion to defend what he thinks is the grain of truth in representationalist views; namely the idea that some of our words and thoughts do seem to respond to the physical world around us. He therefore accepts that some terms represent their environment. But he thinks that many kinds of language represent in a non-environmental way. Similarly, Simon Blackburn agrees that some terms represent their environment and some don't. However, as we'll see in Chapter 4 the two disagree about whether this view counts as any concession to representationalism.

The second use concerns metaphysics, marking a distinction between kinds of facts, truths and properties rather than a distinction between relations between words and thoughts and the world. Consider the predicate 'x is such that grass is green', which is true of every object in the world. Does this predicate correspond to a property? On a minimal reading, it does, for all predicates express properties. There is a property *being such that grass is green*. On more substantial readings, it does not. This is because a predicate only picks out a real property if that property has certain features. For instance, we might think that a real or substantial property must be causally relevant, and that things which have it must all genuinely resemble each other in some way. *Being such that grass is green* doesn't meet these conditions.

This gives us a distinction between minimal and substantial properties. NRPs sometimes say that their chosen discourse does express properties but only in the minimal sense. For instance, deflationists about truth think that *being true* is a property, but only in the minimal sense that some propositions are true and others aren't (Horwich, 1998b, pp.37-40). Expressivists think the same thing about ethical properties (Blackburn, 1993, p.8). In

particular, since expressivists think that ethical properties don't explain anything, they won't accept that they express substantial properties. NRPs may also extend this distinction to facts and truths, where minimal (substantial) truths and facts are those concerning minimal (substantial) properties. In Chapter 5 I will discuss truths, facts and properties at greater length.

Finally, the NRP may simply refuse to specify what 'robust' means, and stick to their minimal reading of the relevant notions. Here are Gibbard and Blackburn on the notion of 'genuine' facts and belief:

Are [ethical facts] just pseudo-facts, incapable of real truth and falsehood? Are beliefs in them pseudo-beliefs, states of mind distinct from beliefs, which we mistake for genuine beliefs? I took no stand on this at the outset, but what do I now conclude? I still weasel: I say that I need to understand the questions. Explain to me "real facts", "substantial truth", and "genuine belief", and I can think how to answer. (Gibbard, 2003, p.182)

For it is not as if we had a notion of what it would be to come across 'genuine' causal, moral facts, but unfortunately have to content ourselves with talking as if we had performed this feat, when we have not done so. (Blackburn, 1986, p.206)

Here we see scepticism about any more robust way of understanding representational features. On this view, NRPs will accept minimal representational features but deny that there's anything else to contrast them with. As such it's not clear whether this counts as qualified rejection since there's no sense in which they reject representational features. However, NRPs will still hold their core view – explanatory scepticism – and deny that these minimal representational features play any explanatory role with regard to the target discourse.

This discussion of qualified rejection gives us better insight into the cases where NRPs may reject a representational feature outright. For instance consider Blackburn's earlier dismissal of representation in the case of ethics: 'moral opinion is not in the business of representing the world' (1999, p.214). How should we understand this claim? For a start Blackburn took this to be compatible with thinking that ethical sentences can be true. So he is not rejecting representation in the minimal sense outlined above, which trivially follows from propositional content. He is best read as making a

qualified rejection, and indeed later in that piece he says: ‘A representation of something as F is typically explained by the fact that it is F. A representation answers to what is represented. I hold that ethical facts do not play this explanatory role’ (1999, p.216). Blackburn isn’t rejecting representation in the minimal sense, but in a more robust sense where representations are explained by what they represent – in other words, an environmental sense of robustness, where the environment plays a role in explaining representation. This environment may be a causally active one, or not. The important thing here is that Blackburn is rejecting that ethical terms’ representational features are explained by their relation external world, be it causal or not.

2.7 Conclusion

We now have a general picture of NRP. With regard to the target discourse, NRP at least involves explanatory scepticism about all representational features – the view that these features play no role in the best ‘what it does and why it’s there’ explanation of the discourse. It may also involve further rejections of representational features defined in more ‘robust’ ways as described above. However NRPs will accept representational features in the ‘minimal’ sense, i.e. whatever representational features follow trivially from the fact that the target discourse has propositional content.

This makes NRP clear and shows how we can do without words like ‘robust’ and ‘substantial’, since we’ve seen that they can actually be explained straightforwardly. We’re now in a good position to assess NRP. In the next chapter, I’ll apply the work from this chapter to the so-called *problem of creeping minimalism*. This is the problem of distinguishing between a sophisticated version of metaethical expressivism – a form of NRP – and its main rival, metaethical *realism*. I will use the account of this chapter to put to rest worries about the solubility of this problem.

CHAPTER 3

SOLVING THE PROBLEM OF CREEPING MINIMALISM

3.1 Introduction

In the last chapter I introduced the common views held by *non-representationalist pragmatists*. In this chapter I apply this discussion to a debate prominent in the recent literature about the view. The debate is about a problem called the *problem of creeping minimalism*, a problem most often taken to apply to metaethical expressivism, which is as we've seen the most developed and best known version of non-representationalism. The problem is that it is difficult to tell metaethical expressivism apart from its rivals, once expressivists accept so-called *minimalist* theories about representational features. Roughly, the idea is that all the denials expressivists used to make – like the denial that ethical language is truth-apt, expresses beliefs, has truth-conditions and so on – disappear once expressivists accept minimalist theories about these notions. This is because minimalism entails that even by expressivists' standards, ethical language has all these features after all. As a result it's hard to distinguish expressivism from its rivals, including realist views which centre on the view that ethical language has all these features.

In this chapter I will start by discussing what I think is the best solution on offer, that proposed by Jamie Dreier (Dreier, 2004). Dreier argues that the difference between expressivism and realism lies in expressivism's commitment to what I'm calling *explanatory scepticism*: the view that representational features play no role in explaining the meaning and use of ethical terms. I use Dreier's account and Chrisman's criticism of it, both which I think are ultimately unsuccessful, to draw out three important points about the problem of creeping minimalism:

- i. The problem should be recast: we should distinguish expressivism from *representationalism* not realism.
- ii. We should not assume too much about the ontology involved in representation.
- iii. We should focus on explanation in order to solve the problem.

Given these, I then offer an alternative solution. The solution still lies in explanatory scepticism. But instead of adopting Dreier's specific version, we need merely say that expressivists are distinctive in excluding representation and belief from their explanation of ethical language and thought. This is enough to protect expressivism from the problem.

After discussing some issues surrounding this solution I turn to recent arguments in the literature on the problem. In particular I examine Christine Tiefensee's arguments against three possible solutions: Chrisman's inferentialism, Michael Williams's 'EMUs' (Explanations of Meaning in terms of Use), and Huw Price's 'e-representation'. Tiefensee argues that none of these proposals can solve the problem, a worrying conclusion since they represent three prominent non-representationalists' primary philosophical resources. I show that with my three key points in mind, we can answer all of Tiefensee's points, and get an interesting conclusion about Price's notion of e-representation. Finally, I look at a possible objection to my solution, which will set up the discussion of global non-representationalism in the following chapter.

3.2 The problem

The problem of creeping minimalism is that once expressivists accept minimalism about various representational features, it is hard to tell the difference between expressivism and realism, which it is meant to oppose. The problem develops like this. The most distinctive expressivist view is that ethical language and thought differs from non-ethical language and thought in an interesting way. It is not that ethical language and thought has a different subject matter from non-ethical language, in the same sense in which thought and talk about tomatoes and chairs has different subject matter. Instead it is that there is some interesting difference in what ethical language *does* and what ethical mental states are like, which can't be explained just in terms of its subject matter. Ethical language is in some way a different kind of thing to non-ethical language. Expressivists have characterised this

difference in various ways: ethical language is not truth-apt, not descriptive, it does not express propositions, it does not state facts or refer to properties. Ethical thoughts are not beliefs or else they're not *representational* beliefs. The problem of creeping minimalism is that expressivists have begun to accept views which seem to collapse the contrasts drawn in these terms. The views which make it difficult are known as minimalist or deflationist views.

As we saw in the previous chapter, minimalist views about representational features say that these features are had trivially by linguistic things and those mental states that have propositional content. To see how this develops, let's begin with a question about the semantic properties of ethical sentences: are ethical sentences truth-apt? Moral realists like Boyd (1988) say that they are and Ayer famously said that they are not. But two factors make recent expressivists like Blackburn and Gibbard agree with Boyd and say that they are.¹ First, they want to accommodate ordinary practice which involves treating ethical sentences as truth-apt. Blackburn says: 'if we are true to the folk, rather than seeking to debunk their sincere and intended sayings or convict them of wholesale error in even deploying their favoured vocabularies' then we will allow talk of truth as applied to ethical sentences (Blackburn, 2010b, p.4). In other words, if we are to accommodate ordinary ethical practice, we ought to accept that ethical sentences are truth-apt.

Second, expressivists accept a minimalist notion of truth-aptness, according to which a sentence like 'torture is wrong' counts as truth-apt just so long as it is meaningful, and can be meaningfully embedded in 'that'-clauses. Since expressivists think that ethical sentences are meaningful and can be meaningfully embedded in 'that'-clauses, they must therefore accept that ethical sentences are truth-apt. They therefore agree with realists about the truth-aptness of ethical sentences. This is not to say that expressivism 'starts off with' the view that ethical sentences aren't truth-apt, but then reluctantly comes to accept that they are. While historically, expressivists like Blackburn and Gibbard have changed their minds and moved from denying to accepting the truth-aptness of ethical sentences, this needn't be true of other expressivists, who may accept from the beginning that ethical sentences are truth-apt, for minimalist reasons.

The same thing happens (more or less) when expressivists accept other minimalist theories about, for instance, propositions, truth-conditions, and assertions. Where previously they may have denied that ethical sentences

¹ In this section I will focus on Blackburn's view just for simplicity.

express propositions, have truth-conditions, and make assertions, minimalism about those notions will lead them to drop these denials and admit that ethical sentences do express propositions, and all the rest. This is because minimalist theories about these notions say, roughly: a truth-apt claim like 'grass is green' expresses the proposition *that grass is green*, is true if and only if grass is green, and can be used to assert that grass is green. The same goes for all other claims. Expressivists agree that ethical claims are truth-apt, and so now agree with realists about whether ethical sentences have truth-conditions, are assertions, or express propositions.

This doesn't stop with semantic concepts like truth and propositions. Minimalist theories of facts entail that by expressivists' own lights, there are ethical facts. On such views, for there to be ethical facts just requires that there are ethical truths, something expressivists are happy to accept:

After all, the minimalism about truth allows us [the expressivists] to end up saying 'It is true that kindness is good'. For this means no more than that kindness is good, an attitude we may properly want to express. We can say that the proposition represents the fact that kindness is good. (Blackburn, 1998, p.79)

On the minimalist view a sentence *S* states a fact just in case *S* is true – given this, expressivists have no reason to deny ethical facts. The same goes for properties – torture has the property *being wrong* just in case torture is wrong, so expressivists have no reason to deny that there are ethical properties either (Dreier, 2004, p.26). So now expressivists believe in ethical facts and properties.

A further application of this is used to accept that ethical facts and properties are mind-independent. Expressivists take the statement that they are to be no more than a first-order ethical claim: that what is right or wrong would still be right or wrong if we didn't think it was (Blackburn, 1998, pp.311-312). Interpreting the thesis that ethical facts are mind-independent in this minimal way lets expressivists accept it.

Finally, psychological notions like belief and representation can be encompassed by minimalism, which says that if 'torture is wrong' is truth-apt (which expressivists think it is) then the associated mental state had by someone who accepts that sentence can be called a belief, and we can say that the sentence and the belief represent the world. On minimalist theories, a sentence '*p*' represents the world as being such that *p* and expresses the

belief that p . It represents the world correctly if and only if p ; it expresses a true belief if and only if p :

Minimalism seems to let us end up saying, for instance, that ‘kindness is good’ represents the facts. For ‘represents the facts’ means no more than: ‘is true’. (Blackburn, 1998, p.79)

The point about belief is important since expressivists usually say that ethical states of mind are *attitudes* which are not beliefs. To think something is good is not to believe it to be a certain way. But minimalism threatens this, as we can see:

Other contrasts, such as that between belief and attitude, may go the same way. For there is nothing to prevent a theorist from allowing a promiscuous, catholic, universal notion of ‘belief’—one that simply tags along with assertion, acceptance or commitment (Blackburn, 2010b, p.4)

And at last, expressivists agree with realists about whether ethical states of mind are beliefs, and whether they are representational.

To see the problem starkly, consider this claim from the prominent moral realist Russ Shafer-Landau:

At the simplest level, all realists endorse the idea that there is a moral reality that people are trying to represent when they issue judgements about what is right and wrong. (Shafer-Landau, 2003, p.13)

Equipped with the right minimalist views (including a minimalist view of *reality* as tagging along with truth), there’s no reason that Blackburn would want or need to deny what Shafer-Landau takes to be crucial to realism. For in Blackburn’s eyes (through minimalist lenses), what Shafer-Landau has said is no more than, roughly: some things are right and wrong, and people want to say that things are right only when they are right, and wrong only when they are wrong.²

Matthew Chrisman argues that part of the challenge of creeping minimalism is that it threatens expressivism’s ability to make ‘a difference to the epistemological and ontological status of ethical discourse’ – i.e. to have the

² The minimalist construal of the idea of aiming at truth is due to Horwich (1998b, p.62).

advantages its defenders have traditionally claimed for it (Chrisman, 2008, p.347). I want to separate two issues: (i) distinguishing expressivism from realism, and (ii) doing so in a way which lets expressivists keep their distinctive advantages (at least by their own lights). I think (i) and (ii) are separate, and in this chapter I will only address (i): I will show how to distinguish expressivism from realism (or as we'll see in §3.4, because I think the problem has been misconceived, how to distinguish expressivism from representationalism). I will not address issue (ii) – whether characterised as I have done, expressivism can keep what its defenders take to be its distinctive advantages. Instead, I will address issue (ii) as part of my broader discussion of the relationship between non-representationalism and metaphysics, in Chapters 5 and 6.

3.3 The 'explanation' explanation

In the same paper in which he sets out the problem of creeping minimalism, Dreier suggests a solution to it. Dreier calls this the 'explanation' explanation (2004, p.39). Its first stage is that the difference between expressivism and realism lies in the stance of those views on the proper explanation of certain target statements. Dreier calls these 'protected normative statements' (2004, p.34), and they include:

(E) Edith said that abortion is wrong

(J) Judith believes that knowledge is intrinsically good

He argues that expressivism and realism differ over what constitutes the truth of statements like these – what it is in virtue of which they are true. He thinks that realists and expressivists will differ over how to fill in the blank in statements like:

(E*) Its being the case that (E) consists in nothing more than _____

(J*) Its being the case that (J) consists in nothing more than _____

This is the first stage of the 'explanation' explanation: expressivists and realists differ over what will (constitutively) explain protected normative statements.

Dreier does not merely say that expressivism will differ from realism in how it fills in claims like (J*) and (E*). He tells us what that difference

is. According to Dreier, realists think that what fills in the blank in such statements must involve ethical facts or properties, and expressivists will say that it needn't involve such things. Characterising expressivism, Dreier says:

In particular, [says the expressivist,] to explain what it is to make a moral judgment, we need not mention any normative properties (Dreier, 2004, p.39).

This is to be contrasted with a realist who thinks that to explain what it is to make a moral judgement, we need to cite ethical facts or properties to which the believer is related in some way. This is the second stage of the 'explanation' explanation: expressivists and realists differ as to whether normative facts and properties need to be cited to explain normative content.

In the terms I introduced in Chapter 2, Dreier is saying that expressivism is distinctive in accepting *explanatory scepticism* about ethical language:

(ES) The best explanation of (i) the meaning and/or use of the relevant terms and (ii) why humans have terms with the features that explain their meaning and/or use doesn't require treating those terms as representational.

Recall that 'treating as representational' is shorthand for 'ascribing representational features'. We can read Dreier as taking the explanation here as constitutive explanation of meaning and as filling in 'treating as representational' as ascribing relations between ethical terms and mental states on the one hand, and ethical facts and properties on the other:

(ESD) The best explanation of (i) the meaning and/or use of the relevant terms and (ii) why humans have terms with the features that explain their meaning and/or use doesn't require ascribing relations between ethical terms and ethical facts or properties.

According to Dreier, expressivists think it is possible to explain ethical terms without ascribing relations between them and ethical facts and properties; realists disagree.

This looks like a good distinction. For expressivists clearly aim to explain ethical language by saying that it expresses distinctive mental states which can be characterised entirely in terms of the effect they have on their possessor's behavioural and emotional profile, and which can be characterised without appealing to a moral reality to which these states are meant to

be reactions. This is often claimed as a distinctive advantage for expressivists:

Its [expressivism's] promise is that with attention to these activities we come to see how our evaluative descriptions of things need no truck with the idea that we somehow respond to an autonomous realm of values: a metaphysical extra that we inexplicably care about on top of voicing and discussing our more humdrum concerns. (Blackburn, 2010b, p.5)

So initially it seems that the lack of appeal to ethical facts and properties is distinctive of expressivism.

Dreier's account is also supported by the literature. In the previous chapter we saw how widely explanatory scepticism is accepted by non-representationalists. To support his specific focus on facts and properties, Dreier draws on Fine (2001), Gibbard (2003), and Price and Hawthorne (1996) to support his view, but there are also other voices in the debate which support it. Simon Blackburn argues that it is definitional of what he calls 'pragmatism' (which includes expressivism) that its explanation of the relevant language does not cite the ontology associated with it – the 'referents [of] its terms, or truth-makers [of] its sentences', as he puts it (2013, p.75). Michael Williams concurs, arguing that an expressivist explanation of ethical language will be 'ontologically conservative' (2013, p.143), which just means that the explanation will not appeal to ethical facts and properties.

The most important feature of Dreier's solution is that it neatly avoids the issue of minimalism. It is compatible for expressivists to accept that there are ethical facts and properties on minimalist grounds, and to deny that such things are part of what constitutes ethical content. Accepting some facts or properties doesn't entail accepting that they do any particular constitutive explanatory work. This shift to explanatory questions is what stops minimalism undermining Dreier's solution.

However, Matthew Chrisman (2008, pp.347-8) argues that when a belief is false, realists cannot say that what constitutes that belief is a relation between the believer and a fact. For if the belief is false, there is no fact for the believer to be related to. Suppose Suzy believes that some given instance of torture *T* is permissible. Suppose *T* is in fact not permissible – it meets none of the criteria that permissible torture must meet. No one will accept

that her belief consists in a relation with the fact that T is permissible since no one believes such a fact exists. So realism cannot be identified as Dreier suggests, or else we could only be realists about true beliefs. This would be unacceptable, since a realist will think that the same story should be told for what constitutes the content of all ethical beliefs.

Chrisman then argues that the only way Dreier can avoid the false belief issue is by appealing to representation. The realist will say that what constitutes Suzy's false belief is that she represents T as permissible. This is possible even though her belief is false, since thinkers can represent the world falsely. This leaves expressivists open to deny that representation is part of what constitutes Suzy's belief, and we get our distinction.

However, Chrisman argues that this alternative route relies on a 'distinction between representational and nonrepresentational mental states' (2008, p.348) which he says collapses given minimalism. The idea is that minimalism, in the same way as I described in §3.2, simply entails that ethical beliefs are representational, even by expressivists' own standards. So it forces them to accept this, and so collapses the distinction as drawn above.

3.4 Learning from the 'explanation' explanation

I think that Chrisman's objections both fail. Dreier's account does not collapse for the reason Chrisman offers, and a representation-based alternative does not collapse under minimalism. However, I think Chrisman's discussion points to some important and interesting issues concerning the problem of creeping minimalism.

I'm going to use my discussion of the above debate to argue for three claims. First, we have been conceiving of the problem of creeping minimalism in the wrong way. We should recast it, and then examine Dreier's view in light of this. Second, Dreier's solution focuses too much on the ontology of representation, and the best solution to the problem of creeping minimalism should not do so. Third, Dreier is right to focus on explanation, and doing so lets us refute Chrisman's second objection. After establishing these three points, I will argue for a solution which improves on Dreier's.

3.4.1 Three lessons

The first point is that we should recast the problem of creeping minimalism. We should aim not to distinguish expressivism from *realism*, but from

representationalism. Representationalism is the view that ethical thought and language is representational, that ethical thoughts are beliefs, and so on. Representationalism is not sufficient for realism.³ Realists typically accept representationalism – but crucially, so do many non-realists. For example, error theorists are not realists, in the sense that they think there are no ethical truths or facts.⁴ But they typically are representationalists: they think ethical thoughts are genuine, representational beliefs. As such, distinguishing expressivism from realism is not the right route. For error theory differs from expressivism in exactly the same relevant respect as realism does: over whether ethical thought is belief-like and representational.

This leads neatly on to the second point. We should not focus too much on the ontology invoked by representational accounts. Error theory gives us a nice route in to this point. Consider again Chrisman's first objection to Dreier: the belief that *p* cannot be constituted by a relation to the fact that *p* where it's false that *p*. A very natural reply to this is to point out that the realist will of course not think it is so constituted, but will instead say that Suzy's belief that *T* is permissible is composed of concepts, including the concept of permissibility. This concept represents things as permissible, and does so in virtue of a relation to the *property* of permissibility. This route saves Dreier from Chrisman's objection: it retains the explanatory role of ethical properties rather than ethical facts.

However, it is at the very least controversial whether all accounts of representation will take this form, of appealing to a relation with properties. Start with error theory. The property view I just outlined would commit error theorists to relations between thinkers and uninstantiated properties, perhaps necessarily uninstantiated properties. If representation means a relation with a property, since error theorists think such properties are not instantiated, they can at best say we bear relations to properties which exist but are uninstantiated. Not all error theorists would want to accept this.⁵ So this is a drawback for Dreier's view. It is not necessarily decisive.

³ In Chapter 6 and Chapter 7 I will argue that it isn't necessary for it either.

⁴ Here I take realism to mean the view that there are things, truths, properties, and so on in the relevant domain, not the view that truth in the domain is objective or mind-independent. I thereby take the same view of realism as Lewis when, describing his modal realism, he says 'For me, the question is of the existence of objects – not the objectivity of a subject matter.' (Lewis, 1986, p.viii). On this view, error theorists are not realists, whatever they might think about the objectivity of ethics.

⁵ While the error theorist Jonas Olson has happily accepted the property view, Bart Streumer rejects it (private correspondence).

However, error theory is just one tricky case: there is a much more general point here, namely that not all accounts of representation take the property or fact view Dreier discusses. There are plenty of representationalist views that do not. Consider a propositionalist view, which takes a belief that p to be a relation to the proposition $\langle p \rangle$. Some take propositions to be composed of senses or concepts, which don't require corresponding properties or entities. Such a view would not require my representing something as F to require a relation between me and F -ness. Yet it would still be representationalist.

Consider also views which say that we can believe things about non-existent objects. Le Verrier's beliefs about Vulcan are still representational in a way which expressivists think his beliefs about right and wrong are not. But it would be a stretch to think that we should account for his beliefs in terms of a relation with an existing object, since Vulcan doesn't exist. The same idea goes for uninstantiated properties. We all want to account for systematically false beliefs, for instance about magic or witches. Not everyone will want to accept uninstantiated properties *being magical* and *being a witch* to help us explain such beliefs. Finally, consider adverbialism about perception. Such a view says that to see something red is to see red-ly, not to bear a relation with redness. Yet this view is still clearly representationalist: this view will not deny that seeing red is representing something as red.

So this is our second point: we should not commit the representationalist to a specific ontological view in order to account for representation. This is uncharitable as a general account of representationalism simply because there are plenty of representationalist views which don't accept this ontology. And we should not rule out these views just to solve the problem of creeping minimalism, a problem, as Dreier says, in 'metametaethics' (Dreier, 2004, p.31)! This point has been obscured because of the focus on distinguishing expressivism from realism specifically, rather than from representationalism.

As such, it might seem that the best route is to say this: expressivists deny that ethical language is representational, representationalists affirm that it is. We then decline to say anything more specific about what representation is. I don't think this is the right route either. But before developing something better, recall Chrisman's second objection: isn't this proposal hopeless, since expressivists won't deny that ethical language is representational, and indeed *can't* deny it if minimalism is true?

No. The whole point of Dreier's account is that what matters is not what features expressivists think ethical language and thought *has*, but which of those features *explains it*. And minimalism does not imply that ethical language and thought is to be explained in terms of representation. It only implies that it is representational, in the sense that ethical language and thought can be said to represent the world. So Chrisman's second objection completely misses Dreier's crucial manoeuvre: the shift to explanation, to *explanatory scepticism* as I've been calling it. This is the third point I want to establish.

3.4.2 A better account

So, we should be distinguishing expressivism from *representationalism* rather than realism, we should not assume too much about the ontological commitments of a representationalist view, and we should remember that the whole account rests on what explains ethical language and thought, not what features it has. What, then, should we say about creeping minimalism?

The first step is to say that expressivists are minimalists about representation and belief, but since those things play no role in their explanations of ethical thought and language, they are still distinct from representationalists. The expressivist may then want to refuse to say more about what representation and belief come to: they know they can do without those words in their explanations, and it's up to the representationalist to give us an account of such things. The important thing is that the expressivist has fended off the trouble minimalism seemed to bring: for now we see that though minimalism forces expressivists to admit that ethical thoughts are representational beliefs, this is not an explanatory claim and so their core theory is untouched.

There's a minor issue with this: how do we classify accounts which don't use the words 'representation' and 'belief' in their theory? For instance, if a reductionist view could be given, perhaps one which reduces an ethical belief to a causal tracking state, this would not use representation and belief to explain ethical thought, yet would still clearly count as representational. More generally, the above view only seems to rule out those accounts which use belief and representation as primitives – as unexplained explainers.⁶

⁶ Thanks to Jamie Dreier for this objection.

There are two responses to this objection. The first is that we need simply understand the expressivist's ban on representation and belief as including anything which might serve as a reduction base for those things. So the reductionist view above rests on the idea that causal tracking *is* representation; her explanatory chain goes:

w means *good* $\leftarrow w$ represents things as good $\leftarrow w$ tracks goodness

(where w is just a word.) The expressivist will not accept this. Representation is itself trivially entailed by w 's meaning *good*, which is directly explained in terms of attitudes:

w represents things as good $\leftarrow w$ means *good* \leftarrow basic sentences involving
 w express intentions, plans, attitudes ...

This captures the idea that representationalists are reducing representation, while expressivists are not putting it in any explanatory capacity at all.

The second response is to give a more thorough account of what representation and belief are. While I think for argumentative purposes, the first response will be enough to save the expressivist, I will explore this briefly for now as it takes center stage in the next chapter.

In my view, the key idea in representation is a relation to what we can call the *subject matter* of the concept in question. Representationalism is the view that a belief involving that concept, or an assertion involving the corresponding term, can only be explained in terms of a relation with subject matter. Of course, this cannot be an ontologically committing thing: otherwise this view is no different from Dreier's. But the notion of subject matter can cover such ideas. For instance, we can think of *representing as good* as involving subject matter, namely *good*, because this has to be characterised in terms of *good*. Equally, though, we can think of tracking goodness or good things as a relation with subject matter, since the characterisation of this requires talking about goodness.

Moreover, even strict reductionist views, like those Moore aimed to undermine, which say that to believe that x is good is to believe it has N , where N is a natural property, rely on the idea that N *is goodness*. In such a case, the view is that to believe that x is good is to believe it has a property which constitutes goodness, and again this involves the *subject matter* of the term 'good'.

Contrast expressivism: to believe x is good is to approve of x , to desire x , to plan to do x , to be disposed to exhort others to do x , and so on. None

of these things requires characterising in terms of goodness. So it does not invoke a relation between ‘good’ and its subject matter. This is what makes such views non-representationalist: they account for belief and assertion involving the relevant concept and term, without invoking relations between these things and their subject matter.

In the next chapter, I will defend this view more fully as an interpretation of other kinds of non-representationalist views, not just metaethical expressivism. However, it gives us a reply to the reductionist problem above. It also puts expressivism in line with other non-representationalist views, as we’ll see. And it does not collapse given minimalism: minimalism does not block this explanatory claim.

So, to conclude: Dreier’s account is right in its basic approach, but it faces two issues. First, it tries to distinguish expressivism from realism rather than from representationalism; this is the wrong focus. Second, it attributes too much of an ontological commitment to representationalist views, perhaps because its focus is more on realism.

So instead we should step back, and argue that while expressivists must accept that ethical thoughts are beliefs and that they represent the world, as do ethical assertions, they need not say this in their explanation of what gives ethical thought and language its content. This is completely compatible with minimalism. When pushed for more of a view about what representation and belief are, the expressivist should, for the purposes of the problem of creeping minimalism, decline to say more. However, there is something interesting to be said here, concerning *subject matter*, which I will develop in the following chapter.

3.5 Other accounts

I therefore think that Dreier’s original solution, altered to avoid relying on facts and properties, and to focus on representation and belief instead, distinguishes expressivism not merely from realists but representationalists in general, and does not collapse given minimalism. However, before we look at some potential issues with the new solution, it is worth applying some points from the previous section to other work on the problem of creeping minimalism. Specifically I want to examine three arguments by Christine Tienfensee, which criticise three solutions to the problem. One of these solutions is Chrisman’s. The other two use two concepts recently developed by

two prominent non-representationalists: Michael Williams's notion of an 'EMU' (an explanation of meaning in terms of use) and Huw Price's notion of 'e-representation'. Tiefensee argues that none of these solutions works.

Tiefensee's arguments are worth discussing for two reasons. First, her pessimistic conclusion is cause for concern: if even the sophisticated non-representationalist machinery recently set out by Chrisman, Williams and Price cannot solve the problem of creeping minimalism, we might well worry that no solution is likely to emerge soon. I will resolve this worry by showing how her objections can be resolved. Second, it turns out that every key point in Tiefensee's critique can be answered by using two of the ideas I defended above: (a) by not focusing on the ontology of representation and belief, and (b) by recognising the importance of *explanation*.

3.5.1 Chrisman's inferentialism

With this in mind let's look at Chrisman's idea. On the basis of his criticism of Dreier, Chrisman rejects representation-based approaches to the problem of creeping minimalism. Instead he thinks we should replace representation with *inference* as the central tool for understanding expressivism (Chrisman, 2008, p.335). On an inferentialist view, the meaning of a sentence is constituted by its inferential role, which Chrisman takes to consist in two things: (i) what circumstances license asserting the sentence and (ii) what further assertions and actions are licensed by asserting the sentence (2008, p.350). Circumstances licensing the assertion may include external conditions but also when other assertions are licensed. So for instance, the sentence 'this is red' means what it does in virtue of the fact that a speaker is licensed to assert it in certain circumstances – for instance when a speaker is confronted with an object of a particular colour, but also when she is licensed to say 'this is scarlet' – and the fact that when licensed to assert it, the speaker is also licensed to assert 'this is not green', and so on.

Note that so far this is all compatible with Dreier's 'explanation' explanation. Dreier is interested in statements of what the meaning of ethical utterances and beliefs consists in; Chrisman is interested in inferentialist versions of such statements. Therefore he can be understood as discussing claims like (E*). Whatever fills those in, he thinks, will be statements of inferential role:

- (1) Its being the case that (E) consists in nothing more than Edith's making an assertion which has a particular inferential role R.

Chrisman's adoption of inferentialism is therefore more or less equivalent to Dreier's first stage: the adoption of a general framework concerning how best to explain ethical meaning, though Chrisman adds that acceptable answers must be inferentialist. And as Dreier does, Chrisman then gives a specific mark of the distinction between realism and expressivism. (Chrisman and Tiefensee both follow Dreier in talking about distinguishing between expressivism and realism, rather than representationalism, but this makes no difference here.)

This distinction is to be given in terms of a distinction between *theoretical* and *practical* reasoning. Chrisman says that the premises of a piece of theoretical reasoning give 'evidential support' to the conclusion, and if that conclusion is true, it 'will usually constitute theoretical knowledge about the world' (2008, p.350). On the other hand, 'the premises of a practical inference should provide *practical* support for the conclusion', which if true 'can constitute practical knowledge about how to interact with the world as we know it to be' (2008, pp.349–350, original emphasis). This distinction yields a distinction between theoretical and practical *commitments*: when one is committed to the conclusion of a piece of theoretical (practical) reasoning, one has a theoretical (practical) *commitment*.

With this distinction in hand, Chrisman says that both realists and expressivists can be understood as offering statements like (1). But realists will fill it in by saying that ethical statements express theoretical commitments, some of which are true, and expressivists will fill it in by saying that ethical statements express practical commitments (2008, p.353). This is the distinction between realism and expressivism. Realism understands ethical language along the lines of other theoretical language; expressivism views ethical language as distinctive in its link to action.

However, Chrisman's proposed solution to the problem has been forcefully criticised by Christine Tiefensee (2016) who argues that it is just as vulnerable to creeping minimalism as other approaches. She focuses her initial objection on the distinction between practical and theoretical commitments. Consider the claim that ethical statements express theoretical commitments. According to Chrisman, this means that they express commitments which if true will 'constitute theoretical knowledge about the world' (2008, p.350). But Tiefensee argues that given the right minimalist theories, the expressivist will accept that ethical commitments are theoretical: given minimalism about 'true', and 'world', she says, there's no reason for

expressivism to reject that true ethical commitments can constitute ethical knowledge about the world (Tiefensee, 2016, p.2443).

Moreover, Tiefensee argues that realism looks compatible with the view that ethical commitments are practical, because for Chrisman practical commitments needn't tie to motivations for action but rather justifications and reasons for action. But realists have no reason to deny that true moral statements justify or provide reasons for actions (Tiefensee, 2016, p.2444). If it's true that torture is wrong, this justifies certain actions. So realists won't deny that ethical commitments are practical.

I think Tiefensee is absolutely right at least about the fact that expressivists can accept a minimalist version of the claim that ethical commitments are theoretical commitments. However, as with Dreier, Chrisman can reply by turning to explanation. He shouldn't say that for expressivists, ethical commitments are not theoretical. He should say that for expressivists, the fact that they are theoretical has no role in explaining them. A sentence like 'torture is wrong' has its meaning *because* it is practical, not because it is theoretical. It means what it does *because* it gives practical support for conclusions based on it as a premise. But it is still theoretical: it still gives evidential support to the conclusion, and when true it constitutes knowledge about the world. It's just that this fact plays no explanatory role whatsoever. For the representationalist, that sentence has its meaning *because* it is theoretical, because it gives evidential support to conclusions based on it, not because it is practical. As with Chrisman's objection to Dreier, Tiefensee's objection can be avoided with more of a focus on explanation. This isn't to say his solution is correct, just that it can avoid Tiefensee's objection.

3.5.2 The EMU

Michael Williams (2013) claims that the notion of an EMU – an Explanation of Meaning in terms of Use – is a good way of understanding expressivism about ethical language as well as distinguishing between non-representationalist pragmatism and representationalism more generally. According to him, an EMU has three components. I will characterise them exactly as Tiefensee does (Tiefensee, 2016, p.2448)

- (I-T) A *material-inferential* (intra-linguistic) component, comprising the inferential patterns in which a concept stands, thus determining its conceptual meaning.

(E-T) An *epistemological* component, specifying the epistemological circumstances of competent language use.

(F-T) A *functional* component, detailing what the concept is used for.

(I-T) is meant to specify the inferential role of a term. For instance, part of the (I-T) clause for a colour-word like ‘red’ will specify inferential connections between that word and other colour terms: from ‘x is red’ you can infer ‘x is coloured’, from ‘x is scarlet’ you can infer ‘x is red’, and so on. (E-T) is meant to specify the circumstances under which a speaker is licensed to make assertions using the term; for instance part of (E-T) for ‘red’ will specify that a speaker can use ‘red’ only to apply to objects which are clearly red. (F-T) is meant to tell us why we have a term of which (I-T) and (E-T) are true (Williams, 2013, p.135). Williams says: ‘The F-clause appeals to use as expressive function: *what* a word is used to do, what it is useful *for*’ (Williams, 2013, p.135).

Tiefensee then suggests that we could try to distinguish realism and expressivism by saying that a realist EMU will differ from an expressivist one. She sets out two EMUs which follow the above pattern, and points out where they match and where they differ. For our purposes, the crucial part of this is that Tiefensee thinks the difference between expressivism and realism will have to be located in two claims, one which is part of the realist EMU and one which is part of the expressivist EMU. The realist claim is this (Tiefensee, 2016, p.2449, my emphasis):

- (2) In a reporting use, tokens of ‘x is good’ express *reliable discriminative reactions* to an environmental circumstance. Their role is to keep track of goodness, in this way functioning as language entry transitions.

What this roughly means is that ethical statements express beliefs which *track* ethical properties, perhaps in the same way that we think our language about our environment tracks the objects in it. Tiefensee considers the idea that expressivists will deny this, and instead will say (Tiefensee, 2016, p.2449)

- (3) ‘Good’ expresses endorsement of inferential patterns that allow for language exit moves, connecting moral commitments with actions. This allows us to coordinate our lives and to deliberate about our actions.

In essence, the disagreement here is over the ‘function’ of ethical language: does it track ethical properties, or does it express some kind of attitude like endorsement?

However, Tiefensee argues that even this account doesn’t work. She argues that expressivists can accept a suitably minimalist reading of (2):

[I]nferentialist expressivists could happily agree that moral statements track moral facts in this i-sense. For, there is no reason for them to deny that someone who masters the term ‘good’ will, given appropriate motivation and conditions, report goodness when encountering it. This is, after all, what being a reliable moral judge is all about. They could even concur that moral commitments express these discriminative moral reactions of ours and track moral truths (Tiefensee, 2016, p.2451)

Here Tiefensee mentions the ‘i-sense’ of tracking: what she means by this is roughly just a minimalist reading, since she is following Price who uses the ‘i-’ prefix to denote minimalist notions.

I take Tiefensee’s point here to be roughly this. On a minimalist reading, the idea that ethical statements ‘track the moral truth’ is nothing more than the idea that some ethical statements are true, and some people are good enough at using them so that they assert more or less *only* the moral truths, and that their moral statements are counterfactually responsive to the moral truth so that, for example, *if* x had been good, they would have said that x was good, and if it had not been, they would not have said so. On this minimalist reading of tracking, an ethical truth-tracker is the person who gets the ethical truths right, and who wouldn’t easily have got them wrong. Since we’re assuming that expressivists can make sense of ‘getting the ethical truths right’, and can evaluate counterfactuals involving ethical statements, they will not deny that ethical statements track the truth in this sense.

So, Tiefensee concludes, taking the route Williams outlines – i.e. focusing on the notion of tracking – will not give us a distinction between expressivism and realism, because expressivists will end up asserting the same things as the realist. And though Tiefensee does not explicitly say so in this passage, this is because of a minimalist reading of ‘truth-tracking’, which Tiefensee calls ‘i-tracking’ due to its link with Price’s ‘i-representation’, a concept we’ll discuss shortly.

3.5.3 E-representation

Tiefensee argues that as a result of this, the only way to get a distinction between expressivism and realism is to understand the notion of tracking in (2) as ‘e-tracking’, which we can make sense of in terms of Huw Price’s distinction between what he calls ‘e-representation’ and ‘i-representation’. Price distinguishes these like so:

e-Representation On the one hand we have the *environment-tracking* paradigm of representation ... – think of examples like the position of the needle in the fuel gauge and the level of fuel in the tank ... In these cases, the crucial idea is that some feature of the representing system either does, or is (in some sense) ‘intended to’, vary in parallel with some feature of the represented system. (Usually, but perhaps not always, the covariation in question has a causal basis.) In biological cases, for example, this notion gives priority to the idea that the function of a representation is to co-vary with some (typically) *external* environmental condition: it puts the system–world link on the front foot

i-Representation On the other hand we have a notion that gives priority to the *internal* functional role of the representation: something counts as a representation in virtue of its position or role in some cognitive or inferential architecture. Here it is an *internal* role of some kind – perhaps causal-functional, perhaps logico-inferential, perhaps computational – that takes the lead. (Price, 2013, p.36)

Roughly, then, a term e-represents if it tracks things in world. A term i-represents if it has the inferential role required to give it assertoric content. We can then read the notion of ‘e-tracking’ in terms of e-representation, taking the two to be more or less the same idea.

Crucially, a term can i-represent without e-representing: a term can be used in assertions, without having the job of tracking the world. Expressivists think that ethical terms are i-representational but not e-representational. We might distinguish them on this basis from realists, who think that ethical terms are both i- and e-representational. This is just the same as saying that expressivists deny, but realists accept, that ethical terms e-track the world.

Tiefensee argues that we need to explain e-representation in more detail, but that the only substantial way of doing so faces a dilemma: it yields either a characterisation of realism which expressivists can accept (thus failing to yield a distinction) or else one which realists won't themselves accept. Tiefensee argues that the best way of cashing out the notion of e-representation (and thereby, e-tracking) has it that ethical language is e-representational just in case it has two features: (i) that 'reports of the presence of goodness must be caused by goodness' and (ii) that such reports 'must be default justified', i.e. 'do not require inferential support from other premises' (Tiefensee, 2016, p.2454). However, many realists will wish to deny (ii). Moreover, there are two readings of (i), one of which realists will reject, the other of which expressivists will accept. Either way, we don't get a distinction between expressivism and realism.

Nothing in my argument will depend on whether ethical sentences are 'default justified' so instead I shall focus on claim (i), that reports of the presence of goodness must be caused by goodness. Tiefensee begins by pointing out that non-naturalist realists, who believe in the causal inefficacy of ethical facts and properties, will reject (i). I think this is sufficient reason to reject this reading, since it fails to account for one of the two major forms of realism. However she goes on to make a further point. She argues that there are two readings of (i), the strong reading and the weak reading. On the strong reading, (i) says that 'moral properties are themselves causally efficacious and that we perceive them through a special, sensory moral faculty' (Tiefensee, 2016, p.2454). While expressivists will indeed deny that moral properties are like this, and therefore will deny (i) on its strong reading, Tiefensee points out that many realists will also reject (i) due to scepticism about the notion of a special sensory moral faculty. The strong reading, then, fails to be acceptable to realists, and so cannot be a necessary component of realism.

The weak reading of (ii), on the other hand, seems more moderate:

This explains that we perceive moral properties, not through some special moral faculty, but in exactly the same way as we detect natural properties. The reason for this is that the former are closely connected to the latter—be they identical to natural properties, constituted by them or supervening on them. Consequently, whenever we detect a causally efficacious natural property that constitutes a moral property—say, we see that

the ruffians inflict severe pain on the cat by setting it on fire—we also perceive the corresponding moral property—here, the wrongness of their action. (Tiefensee, 2016, p.2455)

This seems more acceptable to realists. However, Tiefensee argues, it will also be acceptable to expressivists, for the following reason.

The weak reading of (i), says Tiefensee, depends on the idea that moral properties are, ‘in some sense or other, nothing over and above natural properties such as causing pain’ (Tiefensee, 2016, p.2455). Expressivists, she says, can make that claim too, though for them it will be understood as the expression of an ethical claim, about what wrongness consists in (e.g. causing pain). But if this is so, she argues, then since wrongness just is some natural property, then if those natural properties cause our ethical utterances, then it follows that ethical properties cause our ethical utterances. And so expressivists will be happy to accept (i) on the weak reading.

Tiefensee concludes that e-representation, as cashed out via (i) and (ii), cannot give us a reasonable distinction between realism and expressivism: either it will not be a distinction at all or else will yield a characterisation of realism which realists themselves will reject. It’s worth noting at this point that Tiefensee also thinks of e-representation as being a mark of *ontological commitment*: those bits of language which are e-representational are the ones which carry some genuine ontological commitment, and as such are the ones for which realism is appropriate. She therefore adopts a pessimistic stance about the notion of ontological commitment here: no such notion has been cashed out which distinguishes expressivism from realism *and* which realists will accept.

To sum up, Tiefensee argues that neither Williams’s EMUs nor Price’s distinction between i-representation and e-representation can solve the problem of creeping minimalism. EMUs cannot help by themselves because the best EMU-based strategy uses a notion of tracking, that is acceptable to expressivists when understood minimalistically. When cashed out in terms of e-representation, either expressivists will *still* accept that ethical language is e-representational, or else realists will *deny* that it is.

3.5.4 Replying to Tiefensee’s arguments

As I mentioned earlier, Tiefensee’s arguments are important because they target resources – EMUs and e-representation – given a central role in re-

cent work by prominent non-representationalists. These arguments should worry us quite independently of the problem of creeping minimalism for *ethics*: they threaten some of the core components of contemporary non-representationalism. While I think Tiefensee's argument fails as a whole, discussing it does reveal some important lessons.

First, we must recognise that it's because Williams's EMUs are taken to be *explanations*, that Tiefensee's criticism of EMU-based strategies fails. Tiefensee claims that expressivists might be able to accept the realist's claim

- (2) In a reporting use, tokens of 'x is good' express *reliable discriminative reactions* to an environmental circumstance. Their role is to keep track of goodness, in this way functioning as language entry transitions.

which is part of the realist's EMU for 'good'. But if Williams's EMUs really are *explanations*, then the fact that expressivists can accept that 'good' can express reliable discriminative reactions is not enough to undermine this particular EMU strategy. More is required: expressivists need to think that (2) is part of what explains the fact that 'good' means *good*. They might accept (2) as true, but say that it doesn't belong in the EMU for 'good', because it doesn't have any explanatory role. In other words, even if you are good at tracking the ethical truth, you don't have the concept GOOD in virtue of this fact.

Tiefensee approaches this point herself in the final footnote in her paper. She says:

It might be thought that a stronger focus on function might do the trick, stressing that although inferentialist expressivists might agree that moral concepts establish language entry transitions, they would deny that this constitutes their function. I am doubtful that such a wedge can plausibly be driven between these two theses. (Tiefensee, 2016, n.26, p.2458)

Tiefensee is pessimistic about the notion of 'function' in play here. However, if we read 'function' just in the same explanatory terms as Dreier introduces and I have endorsed, then the 'stronger focus on function' Tiefensee mentions can be understood as putting more emphasis on what explains ethical meaning. And this is precisely the route I want to follow. On this view, the idea Tiefensee discusses becomes the claim that expressivists say that ethical terms 'establish language entry transitions' (roughly that they

track ethical facts), but that this fact does not explain their meaning. So the EMU-based solution doesn't collapse given minimalism after all.

While Tiefensee's argument against EMUs fails, I think Tiefensee is more or less right about e-representation. Price's notion of e-representation can be used as a mark of neither realism nor representationalism. There are two reasons for this. First, whether or not a given kind of language is e-representational depends on whether it has an appropriate causal connection with the kinds of objects, properties and facts that it is meant to represent. But this cannot be a mark of realism or representationalism *in general* because there will be views which accept representationalism (and perhaps realism too) yet deny that the relevant facts and properties are causally active, as Tiefensee rightly points out. For instance an ethical non-naturalist might think that ethical language can only be explained in terms of representing the world, but that the properties and facts it represents are not causally linked to it.⁷

This is one reason we can't rest the general distinction between expressivism (or non-representational pragmatism more generally) and representationalism on e-representation. The second reason is that e-representation does not have explanation built in. In other words, a piece of language may well be e-representational, but this does not entail that its meaning or use is *explained* by its being e-representational. (This is why expressivists could accept that ethical language was e-representational in Tiefensee's weaker sense.) Since I have pinned the distinction between representationalism and expressivism on the issue of what explains the content of ethical language, e-representation is not by itself going to play a crucial role – we need to include explanatory considerations too.⁸ So we shouldn't think that e-representation is a mark of the difference between representationalism and expressivism in ethics. More generally, therefore, we shouldn't think that it's a mark of representationalism versus non-representationalism either.

So while Tiefensee's pessimistic argument fails as a whole, it reveals some

⁷ Perhaps we should rethink the notion of e-representation. Price introduces it with 'e' standing for 'external' or 'environmental'. Some might argue that the 'external' world and the environment includes things which aren't causally active. So there's room here for a kind of e-representation which involves co-variation between language and the world which isn't causal. Then a mark of representationalism could be about whether ethical language is e-representational in either the causal or non-causal sense. Thanks to Huw Price for this point.

⁸ This is not to say that the i-/e-representation distinction is not a good one, nor that it plays no other useful role in discussions of pragmatism and representationalism, just that it can't do the work it needs to do in the solutions Tiefensee criticised.

important general points about the debate about expressivism and representationalism. Moreover, we've seen that the main moves in this debate can all be better understood and answered when we appreciate that *explanatory scepticism* is the key to distinguishing expressivism. Dreier and Chrisman's points are best understood in these terms, and understanding Williams's EMUs in this way helps us see how we might use them to answer Tiefensee's objections.

3.6 Defending explanatory scepticism

There are several further issues with the solution to the problem of creeping minimalism that I've defended. First, one might argue that my reading of expressivism makes representationalism *incompatible* with minimalism. Some argue that minimalism about representation entails that representation is never capable of (even partly) explaining anything.⁹ *A fortiori*, it is not capable of explaining ethical content. Consequently, representationalism as construed here is incompatible with minimalism because it requires representation to (partly) explain ethical content. Insofar as our account should make representationalism and expressivism both compatible with minimalism, the account offered here can't be right.¹⁰

Initially this objection seems to hang on whether a solution to the problem of creeping minimalism has to make both expressivism and representationalism compatible with minimalism. This is controversial. While given expressivists' tendencies to endorse minimalism, it's clear that a solution must make these views compatible, it is certainly up for debate whether we're obliged to make representationalism compatible with minimalism too. In fact I don't think we're obliged to make the two compatible. For it is expressivists' acceptance of minimalism that causes the problem of creeping minimalism to arise in the first place. It is they who accept minimalism and it's their view that then looks similar to representationalism. So all a solution to this problem needs to do is to make expressivism and minimalism compatible, and the resulting view distinct from representationalism. The *problem itself* only requires making expressivism and minimalism compatible. Note that this doesn't let us off giving a satisfactory characterisation of representationalism – it only means that we can do this without making representationalism and minimalism compatible.

⁹ See e.g. Macarthur & Price (2007).

¹⁰ Thanks to Christine Tiefensee for both of the objections in this section.

This doesn't mean that either representationalists or expressivists specifically are under pressure to solve the problem of creeping minimalism, in the sense that either of their views particularly suffer if there's no solution. Perhaps expressivism is the one which suffers, since it can no longer tell us something distinctive. Perhaps representationalism suffers for the same reason. Perhaps expressivism loses its particular ontological and epistemological impact if it goes minimalist. Or, as Dreier thinks, perhaps metaethics in general suffers: 'those of us who feel confident that there is some difference between the two meta-ethical camps should be concerned that we don't know how to say what that difference is' (Dreier, 2004, p.31).

The question of who has to solve the problem of creeping minimalism – who suffers if it isn't solved – is independent of the question of which views must be made compatible with realism. A realist who rejects minimalism may simply not care whether her view is compatible with it, yet she may think it worrying that expressivism looks so close to her view. Or she may not care about this either. An expressivist may not care about representationalism's compatibility with minimalism, yet still think she'd better make her own view distinctive.

We may well then dismiss this issue, and not worry about whether representationalism and minimalism are compatible. However, there is a closely related worry here, which is that expressivists' acceptance of minimalism doesn't only make their view about ethics indistinguishable from representationalism, but also prevents expressivists themselves from taking representationalist views of other areas of language, for instance about natural kind terms. If representationalism is incompatible with minimalism, then an expressivist who accepts minimalism cannot be a representationalist about any kind of language. She therefore cannot consider terms like 'tree' and 'water' to be representational, in contrast with ethical terms. The difficulty here is not about how we distinguish metaethical expressivism from metaethical representationalism, but how expressivists can distinguish ethical language from other, apparently representational kinds of language. Sometimes this particular problem is identified as the problem of creeping minimalism, though this differs from how I'm using that phrase (Williams 2013, p.128, Price 2013, p.148).

This issue is central to the topic of the next chapter: global non-representationalist views. For global pragmatists like Huw Price have argued precisely as above – that minimalism rules out representationalism, and hence

expressivists who accept minimalism should admit that the pragmatism they espouse in the ethical case really applies to *all* language and thought. The debate between globalists like Price and Michael Williams on the one hand, and *localists* like Simon Blackburn and Allan Gibbard on the other, has occupied much of the recent literature on pragmatism. In the next chapter I will address this debate, and thereby address the last two issues raised in this chapter.

3.7 Conclusion

To conclude: in this chapter I introduced the *problem of creeping minimalism*, the problem of distinguishing expressivism from its rivals once expressivists accept minimalist theories about notions like truth, representation and belief. I looked at Dreier's 'explanation' explanation, which locates a difference between expressivism and realism in their *explanations* of ethical language and thought, rather than what features they think that language and thought actually has.

Prompted by Chrisman's ultimately unsuccessful criticism of Dreier, I argued for key three points. First, we should distinguish expressivism not from realism, but from representationalism. Second, we should not understand representation in terms of a relation with existing facts and properties, or in general assume too much about the ontology involved in accounts which explain in terms of representation. These two points are closely connected, since Dreier's account seems to attribute too much ontological commitment to the realist, commitment not all representationalists would accept. Third, we should focus on *explanation*, as Dreier does – Chrisman's second criticism of Dreier missed this fact.

As such, I argued that the expressivist can solve the problem of creeping minimalism by arguing that her view is distinct from representationalism because it does not put representation or belief into its explanation of ethical thought and language. I argued that the expressivist need not say more about what representation or belief are: this is enough to protect her from the problem, since she can happily accept that ethical language represents and that ethical thoughts are beliefs, without saying these things in her explanation of that language and thought. I sketched some further issues here, and suggested that we can understand representationalism in terms of the notion of *subject matter*, which I will discuss in the next chapter.

After doing this I showed how the key points I defended help us resolve several issues raised in the recent literature: Chrisman's criticism of Dreier, and Tiefensee's criticisms of Chrisman's inferentialism, as well as Williams's 'EMUs' and Price's 'e-representation'. I argued that Chrisman himself should simply focus more on explanation, that we should recognise that Williams's EMUs are *explanations*, and that Price's e-representation cannot be a mark of either realism or representationalism.

Finally I raised an issue: is representationalism compatible with minimalism? This is a problem for two reasons. First, it might seem that the expressivist is simply ruling out her rivals in advance, saying that their views are not compatible with minimalism. I don't think this is much of a problem. However, there is a more pressing issue here: if minimalism and representationalism are incompatible, then doesn't it follow that metaethical expressivists have to reject representationalism in all cases? This is the subject of the next chapter.

CHAPTER 4

LOCAL AND GLOBAL NON-REPRESENTATIONALISM

4.1 Introduction

In the previous chapter I discussed the problem of creeping minimalism, the problem of distinguishing metaethical expressivism from its representationalist rivals, given that expressivists typically accept minimalism about certain representational features including truth, reference, belief and representation. I defended Jamie Dreier's solution to the problem: we should understand expressivism in terms of explanatory scepticism, the view that representational notions play no role in explaining the meaning and use of ethical terms. At the end of the chapter I raised a problem for this solution. The problem is that it seems to make representationalism incompatible with minimalism. This is a problem because expressivists may well want to be representationalists about certain kinds of language, other than ethical language. Minimalism would seem to prevent them from doing so.

This idea has much wider significance. It bears directly on the debate between positions known as *local* and *global* non-representationalism. These two positions differ over the proper extent of non-representationalist theories. Localists believe only some language and thought is suitable for a non-representationalist treatment; globalists think non-representationalism should apply everywhere. Localist views include metaethical expressivism, and are extremely controversial. Globalism may then seem even more controversial: for those who are suspicious of the idea that, say, ethical, modal, or probabilistic language does not represent the world, the idea that *no* language does this may seem easily dismissed.

The debate between global and local non-representationalism has taken center stage in the literature on this topic, largely due to Huw Price's ar-

guments in favour of globalism.¹ Price's central claim is that localism is unstable: it collapses into globalism. And one of his arguments for this uses minimalism in precisely the way I just described – it says that localists' commitment to minimalism about certain representational features is what makes their view collapse into globalism.

Price's arguments that localism collapses into globalism are the best-known arguments in the debate. In this chapter I will show that they fail. However, they do not fail straightforwardly. They fail because close attention to the literature shows that the debate between localists and globalists is a merely verbal one. Localists like Blackburn and Gibbard already accept Price's globalism, but Price already accepts Blackburn and Gibbard's localism. Both parties agree: they accept localism in one sense and globalism in another. As such Price's arguments fail to push localism anywhere new, just as objections from localists like Blackburn fail to push Price anywhere new.

The reason for this is that localists and globalists have different views about what non-representationalism involves. Both agree that it involves explanatory scepticism, excluding representational features from explaining the meaning and use of the terms in question. But they have different views about what features are representational. Localists like Blackburn and Gibbard take them to be relations between words (and thoughts) and their subject matter, as I suggested in the previous chapter and will argue in this one. Price takes them to be word-world relations which are suitably *general*, holding between all terms of a given kind, and things in the world. Once we recognise this difference, we see that localists already accept globalism, and globalists already accept localism.

In §4.2 I set out Price's globalist project and his two arguments that localism collapses into globalism. In §4.3 I show that these arguments fail if we read them as localists do, and that globalists should agree with the localists on this; in §4.4 I show that when read as Price wants, localists will already agree with the arguments. In §4.5 I examine other ways we could read Price's arguments, corresponding to the view I've been calling *qualified rejection* about representational features, and I argue that these arguments straightforwardly fail on these readings. Finally, in §4.6 I draw out some consequences of my argument.

¹ See Price (2011, 2013, 2015a); Macarthur & Price (2007).

4.2 Price's globalist project

Price targets his globalising arguments primarily at Simon Blackburn's non-representationalist work. Blackburn defends two views of interest to Price. First, he defends several local applications of non-representationalist theories, most notably expressivism about ethics, but also including a kind of expressivism about modal and causal judgements too. Second, he defends the idea that non-representationalism must remain local: that we cannot give a non-representationalist theory for all kinds of language. There will be some kinds of language whose best theory is not a non-representationalist one. Let's call this view *local non-representationalism* or *localism*. Contrast it with *local applications* of non-representationalist theories to specific kinds of terms, for instance about modal, causal, or ethical terms. Blackburn makes local applications, but he's a localist too. Price, on the other hand, is a *global non-representationalist* or *globalist*. Globalism and localism are views about the proper application of non-representationalist theories, rather than specific applications of those theories. You can be a globalist or a localist without being interested in any specific applications.²

Price argues that local non-representationalism is inherently unstable – it collapses into global non-representationalism. He offers two arguments for this claim. The first is an *external* argument: localists should accept minimalism about representational notions, but minimalism entails global non-representationalism. The second is an *internal* argument: if local non-representationalists think that any local applications of non-representationalism succeed, they should also accept that this success will spread, so that non-representationalist theories can be given for all language. To understand these arguments we need to understand Price's conception of local and global non-representationalism.

Price begins by discussing what Robert Kraut (1990, p.158) calls the *bifurcation thesis*. Roughly, this is the view that there is a division within kinds of language, between those that are in some way representational, and those that are not. For instance, expressivists may want to make a division between ethical language which expresses attitudes, and language about ordinary objects, which expresses beliefs. The bifurcation thesis is a generalisation of this idea.

² Compare someone who thinks that in principle all religions can be debunked, but isn't very interested in any specific debunking.

However, just as there are several different readings of non-representationalist claims, so the bifurcation thesis has different readings. A first pass is that there is a distinction between language which has representational features and language which doesn't. More precisely, there is a distinction between *declarative claims*, and terms used in them, which have representational features and those which don't. We add the clause about declarative claims since everyone agrees that (at least some) non-declarative claims like 'hello' or 'ouch!' don't have representational features. The bifurcation thesis goes further than this: there are some declarative claims which *still* lack representational features. For instance, an emotivist like Ayer would have accepted this thesis, since he thought that ethical claims are declarative yet are not truth-apt, in contrast with verifiable scientific claims which are.

This reading isn't what Price means. Nor should it be. For as we've seen, contemporary non-representationalists no longer deny that their favourite area of language has representational features, because they accept minimalism about them, which entails that all claims with propositional content have the full range of representational features. So they won't accept the bifurcation thesis in this way. How else can we conceive of the bifurcation thesis?

Following the discussion in Chapter 2 we could read the bifurcation thesis in terms of *qualified* rejection: on this reading it says that some declarative claims have representational features in some 'robust' sense that others do not. In Chapter 2 I outlined different ways to make sense of this. However, as we've seen the primary claim non-representationalists make is about the explanatory role of representational features – it's what I've been calling *explanatory scepticism*. And indeed it is an explanatory reading of the bifurcation thesis that Price attacks (2015a, p.139). So from now on we'll follow this, though in §4.5 I'll briefly discuss readings of the bifurcation thesis in terms of qualified rejection.

On an explanatory reading, the bifurcation thesis says that some language is to be *explained* in terms of its representational features, and some language is not. Given the reading of non-representationalism I have defended so far – as centrally involving explanatory scepticism – this is just a statement of local non-representationalism. To be a non-representationalist about a given area of language is, at core, to deny that it is to be explained using representational notions. To accept the bifurcation thesis is to accept that not all language is like this.

Local non-representationalism therefore involves accepting the bifurcation thesis. Price then draws attention to Blackburn's *quasi-realism* (Price, 2015b, p.136). Sometimes 'quasi-realism' is used to mean metaethical expressivism, but there's more to it than this. First, if metaethical expressivism says that ethical language expresses attitudes to be contrasted in some way with beliefs, then metaethical *quasi-realism* aims to explain why we end up expressing these attitudes using language which shares many important features with language which express ordinary beliefs. These features include coming in propositional form, being apt for truth and falsehood, and so on. Quasi-realism, then, is a further project on top of expressivism, of explaining why ethical language looks the way it does if the core expressivist claim is right. Together, expressivism and quasi-realism combine to give us the distinctive 'what it does and why it's there' theory which I introduced in Chapter 2, the theory which tells us what explains the meaning and/or use of the relevant terms, and why we have terms with the features which explain this.

Second, quasi-realism is often taken to be limited to ethical language. This isn't right: in principle, quasi-realism can cover other kinds of language. For Price, quasi-realism is the project of explaining why we use propositional claims in the given domain, whether it be ethical, causal, or something else (Price, 2015a, pp.136-137). For instance, suppose you accept the view that modal claims express inferential dispositions. Quasi-realism, in such a case, means the project of explaining *why* we express inferential dispositions using assertions like 'it is necessary that p' rather than in some other way.

Given this set up, we can now see what Price's global non-representationalism looks like. For a start, it is a globalisation of the quasi-realist project. It is 'a view that takes the same explanatory stance towards what Blackburn calls the 'realist-sounding discourse within which we promote and debate [our] views' for all kinds of views, rather than for special cases (such as moral views)' (Price, 2015a, p.138). Global non-representationalism involves explaining why we have *any* propositional language at all – why we use any sentences which come as assertions, can be called 'true' and 'false', and so on.

However, there's more to global non-representationalism than this. It also involves the view that we can complete this quasi-realist explanatory project *without invoking representational features*. According to Price, 'the

entire story’ about why we have assertoric language ‘is told in nonrepresentational terms’ (2015a, p.143). This nicely matches the interpretation of non-representationalism I’ve been defending: explain what the language does and why we have it, without invoking representational features. I called this claim *explanatory scepticism* – in Price’s case, this comes to the claim:

(GES) All terms can be explained without treating them as representational

to be contrasted with localism

(LES) Some but not all terms can be explained without treating them as representational

Price thinks that (LES) collapses into (GES) Let’s now examine his two arguments for this. I will call them the external argument and the internal argument.

4.2.1 Price’s two arguments

Price’s *external* argument draws consequences from minimalism about representational features. He argues that minimalism collapses the bifurcation thesis. According to Price, the core of minimalism is ‘the claim that these semantic [and representational] notions play no significant theoretical role in a mature theory of language and thought’ (2015a, p.138). On its explanatory reading, the bifurcation thesis says that some language is best explained in terms of representational notions. So minimalism clearly conflicts with it. However, Price argues that anyone supporting local applications of non-representationalism (this includes localists, and of course Blackburn) should accept minimalism, and indeed many non-representationalists do accept it. (The reasons he gives play a central role in the internal argument.) So, he concludes, local non-representationalists are committed to minimalism which entails global non-representationalism, because it entails that the bifurcation thesis is false.

We can set out Price’s argument like so:

- (E1) Minimalism entails that all terms can be explained without representational notions.
- (E2) Local non-representationalists are committed to minimalism.

- (E3) So local non-representationalists are committed to accepting that all terms can be explained without representational notions. (from E1, E2)
- (E4) So local non-representationalists are committed to global non-representationalism. (from E3)

We'll return to this argument after examining the internal argument.

Price's *internal* argument concerns the notion of a successful quasi-realist project. Price points out that a successful local application of non-representationalism, for instance a successful quasi-realist theory of ethical language, will explain its target language without treating it as representational. In particular it will explain why that target language has the features of language that localists take to be representational; it will explain why the target language is assertoric, gets treated in terms of truth and falsity, and so on (Price, 2015a, p.140). Let's say it will explain the *representational appearance* of ethical language. Explaining this appearance without treating the relevant terms as representational *just is* what it is for a non-representationalist project to succeed. Price argues that if a local application like Blackburn's expressivism succeeds, this is good reason to think that similarly non-representational theories can be given of all language, even of language which localists say is representational. It will turn out that it can be explained without representational notions after all (Price, 2015a, pp.140-1).

His argument goes like this. The ethical quasi-realist's explanation of the representational appearance of ethical language 'will offer some function, or 'point,' for the practice of expressing moral judgements (say) in declarative form, and ascribing truth and falsity to the resulting claims' (2015a, p.140). The quasi-realist will say *why* humans will have language which expresses the attitudes which constitute moral judgements – this is the 'why it's there' component. For instance, as Price says, the quasi-realist might show how expressing moral attitudes is extremely beneficial for humans, as it allows us to disagree and argue, and thereby align our attitudes and so coordinate our actions. Price argues that if this works for the case of ethical attitudes, which are to be contrasted with beliefs, then it should work 'in what seems a much easier case: that of the expression of the behavioural dispositions we call beliefs' (2015a, p.140). This is because it is plausible that it would be useful to be able to coordinate and align our beliefs.

As such, Price takes the local success of non-representationalism to be a kind of proof of concept for a global version of the view. For if the

local application really does succeed, this is evidence that representational features really aren't needed in other cases. Moreover, Price argues, if a localist says that representational features *are* needed to explain certain kinds of language, this merely shows she hasn't succeeded in explaining the representational appearance of the language for which she wants to give a non-representationalist account. For in such a case the representational features we needed must be 'associated with some characteristic of use that the merely quasi kind of truth [i.e. notions used in a non-representational explanation] cannot emulate' (2015a, p.141).

So we can set Price's internal argument out like so:

- (I1) If ethical quasi-realism is true, we can explain ethical language without treating it as representational.
- (I2) If we can explain ethical language without treating it as representational, we can explain all language without treating it as representational
- (I3) So if ethical quasi-realism is true, we can explain all language without treating it as representational. (from I1,I2)
- (I4) Therefore if ethical quasi-realism is true, so is global non-representationalism. (from I3)

Note the focus on ethical quasi-realism here. This plays an important role for Price, because he discusses some of the specifics of ethical quasi-realism's attempts at explaining ethical language. Moreover, since Blackburn is his target, it makes sense to focus on Blackburn's most developed specific application of non-representationalism.

4.3 Localism and subject matter

In order to assess Price's arguments, we need to know what counts as *treating as representational*. In Chapter 2 I left this fairly open, for the reason that several important debates hang on this question. Like the case of creeping minimalism in the previous chapter, this is one of those debates. In the end, we find that what Price thinks this means differs from what localists like Blackburn and Allan Gibbard think it means. Consequently, there is actually no disagreement between Price and the localists. When Price asserts his version of globalism, he is not asserting anything Blackburn and Gibbard deny. And when Blackburn and Gibbard deny what they think is

globalism, they do not deny anything Price asserts. As such when we apply these different conceptions to Price's arguments, they only succeed on Price's conception of globalism, and they fail when we plug in Blackburn and Gibbard's view.

In the previous chapter I argued for interpreting metaethical expressivism as the view that the best explanation of ethical language and thought doesn't require saying it's belief-like or representational. I suggested that we can understand these ideas in terms of the notion of a relation with subject matter. I now want to say a bit more about this and how it relates to local non-representationalism more widely.

Metaethics gives us the most famous example of non-representationalism. But there are many others. For instance, consider these non-representationalist views about causation, modality, conditionals, and probability:

1. To believe that Xs cause Ys is to expect a Y given an X
2. To believe that necessarily, P is to be disposed to use $\langle P \rangle$ in reasoning from any premise.
3. To believe that if P then Q, is to be disposed to believe that Q on coming to believe that P.
4. To believe that $\text{pr}(A) = n$ is to be disposed to bet on A at certain odds.³

There is nothing obviously in common between these in terms of the positive view offered about what these beliefs consist in. Moreover, they have little in common with what the expressivist says about ethics: they don't appeal to attitudes or plans at all.

Contrast these views with some rivals:

1. To believe that Xs cause Ys is to believe that an X raises the chance of a Y
2. To believe that necessarily, P is to believe $\langle P \rangle$ is true in all possible worlds
3. To believe that if P then Q, is to believe $\langle \text{not-P or Q} \rangle$

³ The first of these is a crude version of a Humean view. The second is defended by McFetridge (1990) and Divers & Elstein (2012). The third is defended by Stalnaker (1984) and Mellor (1993). The fourth is defended by Blackburn (1980), but has roots in Ramsey (1926).

4. To believe that $\text{pr}(A) = n$ is to believe that in an infinite series of relevant tests, the frequency of As will tend to n .⁴

Again, there is nothing obviously in common between these views.

Despite there being nothing obviously linking the views within each list, the first are all clearly non-representationalist, and the second are all clearly representationalist. I think the best way of explaining this is in terms of subject matter. The second set involves relations between beliefs and their subject matter. The first does not. In the second set we find relations between things that philosophers have taken to constitute the subject matter at hand: probability relations which constitute causation, truth at possible worlds which constitutes necessity, material implication which constitutes conditional truth, and frequency which constitutes probability. These are very specific, reductive views. But other representationalist views include:

1. To believe that Xs cause Ys is to believe that a causal relation C holds between all or most Xs and Ys.
2. To believe that necessarily, P is to attribute necessity to $\langle P \rangle$
3. To believe that if P then Q, is to hold the belief relation to $\langle \text{If P then Q} \rangle$
4. To believe that $\text{pr}(A) = n$ is to ascribe the chance relation between $\langle A \rangle$ and n .

Still we find subject matter on the right hand side: necessity, causal relation, conditional propositions, the chance relation. And note that someone may offer a view like the necessity view without actually believing necessity *exists*: they may be an error theorist.

All these representationalist views contrast with the non-representationalist views above. My view is that the contrast between these views consists in the fact that the non-representationalist theories do not invoke the subject matter of the terms in question. By subject matter, I mean the specific subject matter of the specific term in question. So while a belief that Xs cause Ys does have Xs and Ys as its subject matter, and therefore the account above does mention its subject matter in some sense, it does not mention *causation*, and therefore as an account of the term 'cause' and the concept of causation it does not mention subject matter.

⁴ The first is a crude version of Mellor (1995b). The second is based on Lewis (1986). The third is the material conditional view of conditional beliefs, see Jackson (1979). The fourth is a frequency interpretation of probability, see Mellor (2005, ch.3). I'm not saying anyone has explicitly defended these views, but they are views one might take.

Similarly, being disposed to bet on A, or being disposed to reason with $\langle A \rangle$, or being disposed to believe that Q on coming to believe that P, are likewise not relations with probability, necessity, or conditionals. And, as we've seen, so approving of x, desiring x, or intending or planning to promote and pursue x, are not relations to goodness, whatever they are.

This gives us one general picture of what it is to be a non-representationalist: it is to deny that the relevant term or concept needs to be explained in terms of relations between it and its subject matter. I therefore think the best way of reading localism is as the local denial of the explanatory relevance of relations between thoughts and words and their subject matter, though I want to alter this slightly as we'll see in a moment. So, we can formulate the localist and globalist claims like so:

(LSM) For some but not all terms t , the best explanation of the meaning and/or use of t doesn't require ascribing any relations between t and its subject matter.

(GSM) There is no term t such that the best explanation of the meaning and/or use of ethical terms requires ascribing relations between t and its subject matter.

In this section I will argue for three claims: (i) this is the best reading of the conception of representational features adopted by Blackburn and Gibbard in their discussions of globalism and localism. Given this conception, (ii) both of Price's arguments fail against Blackburn and Gibbard's localism and (iii) even globalists will not accept all the premises of Price's arguments. This shows that globalists like Price do not read globalism in the same way as Blackburn and Gibbard. In the next section I will develop my argument further to show that the localists and the globalists agree with each other, and that their disagreement is merely verbal.

4.3.1 Blackburn and Gibbard

Let's start with Blackburn. In his most notable recent contributions to this debate (Blackburn, 2013, 2010b) Blackburn gives his definition of pragmatism (which in my terms is another term for non-representationalism). Blackburn requires of a pragmatist theory of a class of terms that it

...eschews any use of the referring expressions of the discourse;
any appeal to anything that a Quinean would identify as the

values of the bound variables if the discourse is regimented; or any semantic or ontological attempt to ‘interpret’ the discourse in a domain, to find referents for its terms, or truth makers for its sentences. (Blackburn, 2013, p.66)

Blackburn is defining pragmatist theories as those which don’t use the terms they try to explain. For instance, an expressivist theory doesn’t need to use ‘good’ to explain the meaning of ‘good’ or why we have a term which expresses the kinds of attitudes it expresses.

I think the best way of reading this is to invoke the notion of a relation between a term and its subject matter. For when you use a term in its own explanation, for instance by invoking a causal tracking relation between ‘current’ and currents, to use Blackburn’s example, you are thereby typically introducing a relation between the term and its subject matter. For we can state a term’s subject matter by using it – the subject matter of ‘tree’ is trees. So the non-pragmatist cases Blackburn is envisaging, which include ‘current’, ‘energies’, and other terms he takes to be involved in scientific language, are those where we invoke relations to subject matter to explain the terms. As such, when Blackburn goes on to reject global non-representationalism, he is rejecting (GSM) and asserting (LSM).

The same goes for Gibbard, though the route to see this is slightly trickier. Gibbard admits that he uses ‘expressivism’ differently to globalists like Price. He takes an expressivist theory of a word to be one which ‘explain[s] the meaning of the word via explaining the states of mind that constitute believing things couched with the term’ (Gibbard, 2015, p.212). Metaethical expressivism clearly counts as such a theory since it says that practical attitudes constitute ethical beliefs, and explains ethical terms’ meaning as expressing those practical attitudes. Gibbard claims to be a global expressivist in this sense. And here we can treat ‘expressivism’ as shorthand for ‘non-representationalism’, since neither Gibbard nor the discussion by Price that he cites distinguishes these.

However, Gibbard’s use is idiosyncratic, as he admits (2015, p.213). For what Gibbard calls ‘expressivism’ is really like a psychologistic or ideational approach to meaning, according to which language gets its meaning in virtue of expressing mental states whose content it inherits (see e.g. Davis, 2002). Yet one can be a psychologist without being a non-representationalist. Consider the view that ethical language gets its meaning from expressing ethical

beliefs, which are not attitudes at all but as belief-like as can be, consisting in relations to their subject matter. Such a view is psychologistic but representationalist.

Gibbard does recognise that this use of ‘expressivism’ does not match that of a globalist like Price, and claims that his own view is in fact at odds with globalism.

Perhaps he [Price] uses the term ‘expressivism’ to exclude giving any notion of representation a genuine explanatory role, a genuine role in explaining meaning. I’m not building this exclusion into the meaning of ‘expressivism’, and trivially if Price does then the position I am suggesting doesn’t qualify as ‘global expressivism’ in his sense. (Gibbard, 2015, p.213)

This makes it seem likely that Gibbard’s view really will conflict with global expressivism as the globalist understands it. And indeed later on Gibbard endorses ‘representationalism’ at least in some cases, and claims that his view will involve ‘explaining also in terms of representation’ (Gibbard, 2015, p.215). So here we see Gibbard rejecting the idea that representational notions never do any explanatory work.

But now let’s see what Gibbard counts as representation. He claims that representational terms are ones which *track* the environment, where tracking is a causal relation with the world. He takes representational thoughts to involve ‘a relation to the states of affairs we are thinking about’, a relation which is causal (2015, p.215). As such, he thinks that the representational terms are those whose explanation requires (causal) relations with subject matter. For causal tracking relations are relations between terms and their subject matter: ‘tree’ causally tracks trees, and so on. So in the end, Gibbard too denies (GSM) and asserts (LSM).

Before we move on to Price’s arguments, it’s worth noting something important. Both Blackburn and Gibbard are interested not just in relations with subject matter, but cases where these are cashed out in terms of causal tracking relations with the environment, with things to which the predicate in question applies. For instance, they are both interested in cases like ‘tree’ which causally tracks trees. This means that Blackburn and Gibbard are both focused on a limited subset of the wider class of relations with subject matter. For instance, a relation between a believer and a proposition will count as a relation with subject matter even if that proposition is about a

property which doesn't exist. Yet Blackburn and Gibbard are not particularly interested in relations like this.

I think this is because like Dreier in the previous chapter Blackburn and Gibbard are more interested in cases where we have to invoke a specific ontology – a group of objects of a given kind – in order to explain our language and thought. For them it is not specifically the idea that to explain assertions involving 'tree' we have to invoke the notion of *representing as a tree* or *believing to be a tree*, but the idea that we have to invoke trees themselves to do this work. So Blackburn and Gibbard are focusing only on a subset of representational features, namely those which are relations with things in the world which satisfy the concept or term we're explaining.

They shouldn't think these exhaust the representational features, since they will want to believe that 'witch' and 'magic' are representational, yet cannot think that utterances of 'magic' are caused by magic things. In such a case they should say that 'magic' can only be explained in terms of subject matter: representing as magical, believing to be magical, believing a proposition of the form $\langle x \text{ is magical} \rangle$, or something which constitutively explains these things. But in what follows we can read them as restricting their view to relations to subject matter which include things like causal tracking – those relations which involve the ontology. My argument is unaffected by this restriction.

4.3.2 The arguments

Now we've seen that the localists Blackburn and Gibbard take representational features to be relations to subject matter, though in a stricter sense than I have been understanding them, we can formulate Price's arguments in these terms. Let's start with the external argument, and return later to the internal one:

- (ER1) Minimalism entails that all terms can be explained without relations to subject matter.
- (ER2) Local non-representationalists are committed to minimalism.
- (ER3) So local non-representationalists are committed to accepting that all terms can be explained without relations to subject matter. (from ER1, ER2)
- (ER4) So local non-representationalists are committed to global non-representationalism. (from ER3)

This argument applies to Blackburn and Gibbard's localism because they take global non-representationalism to be the claim that no term's meaning is explained in terms of relations with its subject matter. However, the argument fails, because either premise (ER1) or else (ER2) is false; in either case (ER3) is therefore false too.

(ER1) says that minimalism entails that relations to subject matter are never needed to explain terms' meaning and/or use. (ER2) says that local non-representationalists are committed to such a view. At least one of these claims is false, and globalists like Price will admit this too. To start with, notice that a theory like Paul Horwich's minimalism about reference denies that there is any *constitution* theory to be given for reference, a theory of the form:

The relation of x referring to y *consists* (roughly speaking) in x bearing relation r to y (Horwich, 1998a, p.123)

The same goes for truth (1998a, p.104). Horwich thinks that there's no property which *constitutes* being true – for Horwich, this means there's no property which is possessed by all and only the truths and which explains the characteristic features of truths.

However, Horwich himself claims that the best explanation of the use of a term – which for him is the best theory of what constitutes that term's meaning – may sometimes involve a relation between that term and its subject matter (1998a, pp.65-66). He gives 'red' as an example (1998a, p.45). Yet Horwich is one of the best-known minimalists about truth and reference. So if even a minimalist like Horwich will deny (ER1), it doesn't seem plausible.

The above points help us answer the worry from the previous chapter: that minimalism is incompatible with representationalism. We can now see that there is no problem here. Minimalism about notions like truth, representation, belief, will not entail that all possible uses of those concepts cannot explain. Instead, it just denies that there's a constitution thesis for these things, some underlying property each has which explains it.

This allows us to explain in terms of representation and belief. For a minimalist can allow that these things are *disjunctive*: that many different things can count as representation. This is because a minimalist about representation thinks representation follows trivially from meaning, and so if we think that meaning is not itself constituted by anything across the board,

we will not think so about representation either. Non-representationalists do not think meaning is constituted by one thing: many different things can explain meaning. So they will be able to say that representation, too, is explained by many different things.

Now, this lets us explain in terms of some relation or feature which does count as representation, so long as we don't say that that feature *constitutes* representation. So, for instance, an expressivist can perfectly well say that some terms are explained in terms of causal tracking, without saying something incompatible with minimalism, for she will also say that causal tracking does not constitute or explain representation itself. Minimalism has no problem with these piecemeal explanations, so long as there is no claim that there is a general category of representation which can itself do explanatory work. Instead, we can just give explanations in terms of the various things which count as representation, rather than one unified category.

Suppose instead we shift our conception of minimalism to exclude Horwich from the minimalist camp, at least for the purposes of the argument. In such a case, we'd make (ER1) true by fiat. But in doing so we would make (ER2) false: local non-representationalists aren't committed to minimalism, if this is what minimalism means. A localist like Blackburn is explicit about relations to subject matter being necessary to explain some terms. Discussing Horwich's claim that some terms can be explained without recourse to these relations, Blackburn says:

Here it seems to me Horwich may be right, and certainly for the purpose of this essay I have no quarrel with his claim. But notice how weak the claim is. It is only that the fundamental acceptance properties governing the use of a term [for Horwich, these are what explain meaning] need not relate the understanding user to the extension. But it clearly *can* do so, for certain terms, or certain families of terms. (Blackburn, 2012, p.206, original emphasis)

He then goes on to wonder whether this casts doubt on minimalism. So clearly for Blackburn, *if* minimalism is right it doesn't entail that *no* terms are explained by their relations to their extensions, i.e. their subject matter. So (ER2) is false.

One might argue that Blackburn's view entails minimalism whether he likes it or not. However, this can't help globalists like Price. For they too

admit that some terms are explained using relations to their subject matter, and hence they cannot coherently accept (ER1). So, just as with Blackburn and Horwich, they too won't think that minimalism entails that no terms are to be explained in terms of relations to subject matter. To see this let's look at Price and Michael Williams.

Michael Williams says there are terms whose explanation involves speakers' *reliable discriminative reporting dispositions* or *RDRDs*. Like Horwich, he gives 'red' as an example:

To master 'red' in its reporting use, the speaker must have a reliable discriminative reporting disposition (RDRD): a disposition, given appropriate motivation and conditions, to report 'x is red' only in the presence of a red thing in his field of vision. (Williams, 2013, p.140)

For Williams, then, the explanation of why 'red' means *red* necessarily involves a link between 'red' and red things – a link mediated by speakers' perceptions. Note that Williams is not merely saying that people have RDRDs regarding red things, but that 'red' gets its meaning *in virtue of* these. He makes the above claim in the context of sketching an 'EMU' – an explanation of meaning in terms of use – for 'red' (2013, p.133). The claim about RDRDs is therefore meant to be an explanatory one.

Price too thinks that some terms will be explained using relations with their subject matter. He admits that some terms 'e-represent', as he puts it (Price 2015a, p.147, Price 2013, pp.36ff, pp.175ff). Price takes e-representation to be a kind of causal tracking relation between a term and its subject matter. Price approvingly cites Williams's case of 'red' as a case of e-representation, and as a case where the best explanation of the term invokes e-representation (Price, 2013, p.175).

Moreover, Price has good philosophical reason to accept that some terms should be explained in terms of e-representation. For Price is primarily interested in explaining patterns of linguistic use:

The challenge [for the non-representationalist] is now simply to explain in naturalistic terms how creatures like us come to talk in these various ways. (Price, 2013, p.20)

Environmental representation often involves a notion of tracking, cashed out in a causal way: utterances of a given term are caused by the (perceived) presence of a given object. In the case of 'red', speakers with the

right RDRD are disposed to report 'x is red' only when there is a red thing visible. But this is clearly part of an explanation of why the claim gets uttered: the speaker's RDRD, plus the presence of a red thing, plus the link between RDRDs and her understanding of the word 'red' *explain why* she said 'x is red'. So here the link between 'red' and the red thing – a link which counts as environmental representation – is not only present but also *explains* why the term gets uttered. There's no good reason for Price to deny this.

So, reading the external argument in terms of relations to subject matter, we find that it fails. At least one of the premises is false. Whether or not they're committed to minimalism, local non-representationalists are not committed to accepting the globalist view that all terms can be explained without relations to subject matter. Next let's look at the internal argument.

Applying the subject matter reading, the internal argument comes out like this:

- (IR1) If ethical quasi-realism is true, we can explain ethical language without invoking relations between ethical terms and their subject matter.
- (IR2) If we can explain ethical language without invoking relations between ethical terms and their subject matter, we can explain all language without invoking relations between terms and their subject matter.
- (IR3) So if ethical quasi-realism is true, we can explain all language without invoking relations between terms and their subject matter. (from IR1,IR2)
- (IR4) Therefore if ethical quasi-realism is true, so is global non-representationalism. (from IR3)

However, this argument fails because premise (IR2) is false and consequently so is (IR3). Moreover, globalists like Price and Michael Williams will and should agree with this diagnosis.

(IR2) says that if we can explain ethical language without invoking relations between ethical terms and their subject matter, we can generalise this kind of explanation to all cases. This premise is false, and neither localists or globalists will accept it. The reasons for this are the same reasons that the external argument failed. For since we saw that both localists and globalists think that some terms must be explained by relations to their subject matter, they will reject (IR2)! They will take ethical language as distinctive, in

being explicable without its subject matter. But they won't think this can extend to all kinds of language.

As such I've established the three claims mentioned at the beginning of this section: (i) the relations to subject matter reading is the best reading of Blackburn and Gibbard's view, (ii) given this conception, both of Price's arguments fail, and (iii) given this conception, globalists won't accept all the premises of these arguments anyway. However, so far I haven't shown that the local/global debate is verbal. I've only shown that localists' views don't collapse into globalism, when we read globalism in the way localists favour, and that globalists should and do accept localism when read in this way. This doesn't show that the debate is verbal: it's simply bad news for globalists! The debate only becomes verbal when we see that localists *do* accept globalism when we read it as globalists want to read it. Showing this is the task of the next section, where I'll examine how Price's arguments fare when we read them in Price's way.

4.4 Globalism and generality

Price doesn't share the localists' conception of representational features as relations to subject matter. In his defences of global non-representationalism, Price frequently discusses whether reference, representation and the like are in some sense *general*. He talks about their being uniform or univocal (Price, 2011, pp.32-33), whether all meaningful descriptive sentences have something *in common* which explains them (Price, 2004, p.201), and whether we should think of all sentences in language as being "about' some aspect of the external world, *in much the same way*' (Price, 2013, p.40, emphasis added). Summing up his view in a recent paper, Price says:

In particular, it is open to us to take the view that at least by the time we get to language, there is no useful external notion, *of a semantic kind*—in other words, no useful, general, notion of relations that words and sentences bear to the external world, that we might usefully identify with truth and reference. (Price, 2015a, pp.146-157)

Taking Price's term 'useful' to mean something explanatory, in the sense we've been discussing, this amounts to a denial that there are any properties of language which satisfy these three conditions: (i) they are relations

between language and the world, (ii) they explain terms' meaning and/or use, and (iii) they are *general*.⁵ In other words, Price thinks that no term's meaning is explained by its possession of a relational property which is *general*.

Following the template earlier, this gives us readings of local and global non-representationalism as follows:

(LEG) For some but not all terms *t*, the best explanation of the meaning and/or use of *t* doesn't require ascribing to *t* a *general* relation between language and the world.

(GEG) There is no term *t* such that the best explanation of the meaning and/or use of ethical terms requires ascribing to *t* a *general* relation between language and the world.

However, now we need to understand what 'general' means, and whether this gives global non-representationalism any more hope. Note also that Price talks in terms of relations between language and the world, rather than terms and their subject matter. This will be important shortly.

First, we might think that a relation is general just in case it holds between *all* terms and something in the world: there is a relation *R* such that for each term *t*, there is something to which *t* bears *R*. But if we read 'general' this way, (GEG) becomes too easily true. Nobody thinks that every single linguistic thing is to be explained in terms of the very same relation with the world. Even if relations to the world are what explain meaning, no single relation is going to be part of the explanation of *all* of the many different kinds of words and phrases in our language. So if (GEG) is merely the denial of an extremely general but explanatory relation which links all terms to the world and thereby explains their meaning and/or use, it hardly seems like a radical departure from mainstream philosophy of language. Moreover, it seems perfectly acceptable to localists. So this can't be the right reading of generality.

An alternative way of understanding generality is to take (GEG) as saying that there are no relations which explain all terms of a given *kind*. So what (GEG) denies is not (just) the existence of a general relation linking all words to the world, which explains some of those terms' meaning and/or

⁵ The clause about generality encompasses Price's claim that they can't be identified with truth and reference, which would count as general properties and relations in this way.

use. Instead it says that even for a given *kind* of term, there is no relation which all terms of that kind bear to the world, and which explains their meaning and/or use. So for instance, supposing we take all adjectives to be of the same kind, (GEG) says that there is no relation which all adjectives bear to the world and which explains their meaning and/or use.

There are questions about what constitutes a ‘kind’: the less we know about what a kind is, the less we know about global non-representationalism. Putting this issue to one side, when read in this way (GEG) does indeed conflict with some mainstream theories of meaning. For instance, at least one kind of causal theory of predicate reference seems to violate (GEG), since it takes all predicates to be explained in terms of their causal link with the members of their extension. This is a relation between all terms of a given kind and their subject matter. Moreover, (GEG) is not obviously false; it seems at least (epistemically) possible that there are no general – i.e. kind-relative – explanatory relations of the kind (GEG) denies. Indeed this is part of what local forms of expressivism require, a fact we’ll discuss more later.

However, on this reading (GEG) is still too weak. For a start, it’s compatible with the view that there are no *general* relations to the world which explain terms’ meanings, not even ones within kinds, but that all such relations which do explain meanings are relations to subject matter. Someone might agree that two different relations are needed to explain the meaning and/or use of, say, ‘tree’ and ‘number’, but they may also say that whatever those relations are, they will be relations between ‘tree’ and trees, and ‘number’ and numbers.⁶ In light of this issue, we need to add to (GEG) the claim that not all terms’ meaning is explained by relations to their subject matter, and to add the same to the localist claim:

(GEGX) There is no term *t* such that the best explanation of *t*’s meaning and/or use requires ascriptions to *t* of a *general* relation between language and the world, and there are some terms such that the best explanation of their meaning and/or use doesn’t require ascribing relations between them and their subject matter.

(LEGX) For some but not all terms *t*, the best explanation of *t*’s meaning and/or use requires ascriptions to *t* of a *general* relation

⁶ This kind of view is discussed and rejected by Horwich (1998a, pp.22-23), because he thinks that it relies on a non-deflationary theory of truth, which he thinks is indefensible.

between language and the world; and there are some terms such that the best explanation of their meaning and/or use doesn't require ascribing relations between them and their subject matter.

This rules out these non-expressivist but non-general views. It also recognises the fact that Price primarily focuses on (i) the generality or univocity of representation, and (ii) the possibility of explanations of terms which don't put them in relations with their subject matter.⁷

So, let's interpret Price's arguments using this notion of generality. The external argument becomes:

- (EG1) Minimalism entails that all terms can be explained without general relations between language and the world.
- (EG2) Local non-representationalists are committed to minimalism.
- (EG3) So local non-representationalists are committed to accepting that all terms can be explained without general relations between language and the world. (from EG1, EG2)
- (EG4) So local non-representationalists are committed to global non-representationalism. (from EG3)

and the internal argument becomes:

- (IG1) If ethical quasi-realism is true, we can explain ethical language without invoking general relations between language and the world.
- (IG2) If we can explain ethical language without invoking general relations between language and the world, we can explain all language without invoking such relations.
- (IG3) So if ethical quasi-realism is true, we can explain all language without invoking general relations between language and the world. (from IG1, IG2)
- (IG4) Therefore if ethical quasi-realism is true, so is global non-representationalism. (from IG3)

The key premises in these arguments now become true. For if we understand generality in terms of kinds, minimalism *does* entail that there are

⁷ Price talks about word-world relations, but even, say, *desiring* *x* is a word-world relation, between the desirer and *x*. So we should focus on relations with subject matter rather than word-world relations as such: these are the things local non-representationalists deny and which Price will have in mind in the case of (LEGX).

no kind-level relations which explain meaning. For instance, it seems likely that a minimalist would accept that there is no one relation that predicates all bear to the world which explains their meaning, since such a relation would be correctly said to *constitute* meaning, something minimalists deny. Indeed minimalists like Horwich (and, of course, Price) believe this, as we've seen. Moreover, localists do seem to accept minimalism in this sense, because they think different terms of the same kind may need explanation in different ways – 'good' and 'wrong' are not going to be explained in terms of the same relation with the world as 'tree' and 'cat', for instance. (EG1) and (EG2) are therefore true.

Localists like Blackburn should also agree that explaining ethical terms without citing general relations with the world is enough to show that no terms need explaining in this way. This is simply because by showing that ethical terms get explained differently to other terms which are similar in kind, they *already* discounted kind-level relations from having any explanatory role. 'Good' is not to be explained in the same way as 'tree', but any kind-level relation of the kind mentioned in the above arguments would have to explain both these terms since they are of the same kind. So no such kind-level relation does explanatory work here. Therefore (IG2) is true, alongside (IG1).

One might think that globalism therefore comes out victorious. But this is not so. Localists will simply reject the inference between the final premises and the conclusions of these arguments. This is because they won't count the global denial of general, explanatory word-world relations as global non-representationalism. For them, global non-representationalism is the global denial of explanatory relations to subject matter. So while they will accept that no general relations explain any terms, they will not count this as incompatible with their localism. We saw above that it is the relations to subject matter view that localists like Gibbard and Blackburn hold – Blackburn goes so far as to make it part of his definition of pragmatism. So these arguments won't move Blackburn and Gibbard.

The argument of the last two sections shows that globalists and localists are merely talking past each other. They're interested in different things, and count different kinds of theories as non-representationalist theories. So while Price's globalising arguments may be interesting, they don't show that localism is unstable. Localists never *denied* what Price takes to be globalism, so it isn't unstable, as Price says. Nor does Price *accept* what the

localists think globalism is. They already agree with each other, and Price's arguments don't force anyone to change their view.

So far, then, we have sufficient reason to believe that actual localists and globalists don't disagree, but merely have different views about what counts as a non-representationalist theory. As such, even if localism is true, the 'bifurcation thesis' still stands if we read it as localists do: some claims are to be explained in terms of relations between them and their subject matter, and some are not. It does not stand if we read it as globalists do: *no* claims are to be explained in terms of *general* word-world relations.

4.5 Qualified rejection

What about reading the bifurcation thesis in terms of qualified rejection? Then it would say that some declarative claims have genuine or robust representational features and others don't. Do Price's arguments impact this thesis? Recall the two ways qualified rejection is often read: in terms of environmental representation, and in terms of metaphysical substantivity.

Neither minimalism nor the success of local forms of non-representationalism threatens to collapse the distinction between claims that represent their environment and those that don't. We already saw this in action in §4.3. Nobody denies that some claims represent their environment, and the fact that we can explain some kinds of language without environmental representation doesn't entail that no language represents its environment. Moreover, as we've seen minimalism has no impact on this issue, so if we draw the bifurcation thesis in these terms it still stands.

What about metaphysical substantivity? On this reading the bifurcation thesis says that some declarative claims correspond to metaphysically real facts and properties and others don't. Minimalism might seem to have an impact here. We might argue as follows: minimalism deprives us of any more metaphysically weighty notion of a fact or a property. It only allows a notion which tags along with propositional content, so that any true claim has a corresponding fact and property – the claim that grass is green corresponds to the fact that grass is green, and ascribes the property *being green* to grass, and so on for all other true claims. So this leaves us no room to distinguish between claims which correspond to real properties and facts and those which don't.

However this is too pessimistic. It relies on the idea that if we are min-

imalist about a certain notion, we cannot make sense of any less minimal version of it. This is false. For instance, consider a minimalist about truth, who thinks that for $\langle \text{grass is green} \rangle$ to be true takes nothing more than grass's being green. Such a minimalist can easily stipulate other senses of truth which build upon this. For instance, suppose someone said that some truths are interesting and some are not. The minimalist can easily make sense of this. For $\langle \text{grass is green} \rangle$ to be an interesting truth is for grass to be green and for it to be interesting that grass is green. (Or perhaps, for it to be interesting whether grass is green.) And so for propositions in general. The minimalist has no problem with this. She only has a problem with thinking that there is any non-trivial thing to say about the core notion of truth on which the notion of interesting truth is built.

Let's apply this to facts and properties. Minimalism gives us one notion of facts and properties which we can then build on to get the relevant substantial notion. It tells us that the fact that p exists if and only if p , and that an object o has the property *being F* if and only if o is F . It says that these two claims exhaust our ordinary notion of fact and property, and are *basic*: there is no further truth which explains them. But it doesn't rule out using such notions to build more complex ones. For instance, a minimalist can accept the notion of a mental property, perhaps by saying *being F* is a mental property if and only if all the things which are F are mental. This is compatible with minimalism, because it doesn't require adding anything to our basic understanding of properties.

Consider now a distinction used to motivate the notion of a metaphysically substantial property: there is something different between a gerrymandered property like *being such that grass is green* and, say, *being green*. The former doesn't have any explanatory power and doesn't ground any genuine resemblance between the things which have it, but the latter does, at least to some greater extent than the former. We rarely if ever explain things in terms of their having the former property, but we more frequently explain things in terms of their having the latter, for instance when we ask why the traffic light caused drivers to accelerate. And the things which share the former property do not resemble each other – they include all objects, which differ from each other in all possible ways! On the other hand, things with the property *being green* do seem to resemble each other, at least to a greater extent.

A minimalist can accept this, by simply reading the claims about these

two properties in terms of ordinary truths about things which are such that grass is green. There are very few true explanatory claims of the form *p because x is such that grass is green*. Perhaps there are more true claims of the form *p because grass is green* but that is quite different. Nor are things which are such that grass is green similar to each other: since every object is such that grass is green, the collection of these things is as diverse as can be. Importantly, we can state all this without using words like ‘property’. If there is a metaphysical distinction to be had here, a minimalist can accept it by building on the ordinary notions of facts and properties that we have, and understanding the further elements we add without resorting to property- and fact-talk.

This isn’t to say that we should accept a metaphysical distinction of this kind or that it’s defensible, just that minimalism doesn’t affect this issue. Minimalism doesn’t undermine the bifurcation thesis read in terms of metaphysical substantivity. It doesn’t deprive us of more substantive notions of truth, representation, property and so on. It just argues that our ordinary notion should be understood in the minimal way it suggests, in terms of schemas like the T-schema. The success of local forms of non-representationalism does not undermine the bifurcation thesis either – it has nothing to do with it at all. So we’ve found no reason that either minimalism about representational features or the success of local applications of non-representationalism collapses the bifurcation thesis, read in terms of qualified rejection.

4.6 Consequences for non-representationalism

So far, we’ve seen that Price’s arguments for global non-representationalism do not fail so much as fail to lead localism anywhere new. For localists already accept Price’s globalism, and Price already accepts the localists’ localism. This is because the two camps have different views on what counts as a representational feature, and hence different interpretations of *explanatory scepticism*, the key non-representationalist claim. We’ve also seen that these same arguments have no impact when we consider the view I’m calling *qualified rejection*: they don’t force non-representationalists to accept qualified rejection with regard to all language.

This doesn’t just affect Price’s arguments. It also affects Blackburn’s (2013) argument against globalism, which following Kraut (2001) he calls

the *no exit* objection. The argument says that a non-representationalist theory of a particular discourse – a ‘what it does and why it’s there’ theory – cannot use the terms which are being explained. Since this is not always possible, there are some discourses which need a representationalist theory, and so globalism is false.

As we’ve seen, this localist argument completely misses its target, for Price doesn’t see non-representationalism as a matter of avoiding using the terms in question, but of avoiding *general* word-world relations. The fact that we have to use some terms in their own explanation doesn’t entail that we have to use general word-world relations to explain them. Indeed, as we’ve seen, localists like Blackburn *already* accept Price’s view. So the no exit objection succeeds against globalism as Blackburn reads it, but trivially fails against globalism as Price reads it.

What should we take away from this result? At first sight it makes Price’s globalism less radical: Price’s view is already in play, localists already accept it and they don’t have to change any of their view to agree with it. However, this is too quick. Price could argue that localists tacitly rely on the idea that alongside the areas of language for which they give non-representational theories, there are areas of language which can be satisfactorily explained using general categories like truth, belief and representation. Their views may entail globalism, but they haven’t yet appreciated the consequences of this.

Indeed Price does seem to think this:

Blackburn’s local quasi-realist will presumably come to the table with some ready-made (Fregean?) theory of how the relevant phenomena are to be explained in the genuinely descriptive domains, where there isn’t a need to accommodate underlying functional diversity (at least of the relevant kind). The task is then to show how bits of language with different basic functions can then properly emulate the surface characteristics of the genuinely descriptive domains. Global [non-representationalism] requires a different approach. Since it rejects representationalism altogether, it cannot begin by assuming that there is a class of cases for which the explanation of the surface phenomena is already available, at least in principle. (Macarthur & Price, 2007, p.247)

In other words, localists may tacitly assume that there is some class of words – perhaps those like ‘tree’ and ‘cat’ – which all fundamentally have the same function, and so don’t exhibit the ‘functional diversity’ exhibited by, say, ethical and modal terms, and whose meaning and use *can* be characterised in representational terms. Price argues that this collapses if globalism is right, for we can never use representational features to explain any terms. So we cannot assume that there’s some neatly outlined class of words for which representationalism will work, and Price thinks localism rests on such an assumption.

According to Price, this has two consequences. First it means explaining not only each kind of language we see, but assertoric language *as such*. It means saying why we have assertions – utterances which say that something is the case – at all. Extending this to the psychological, it means saying why we have *beliefs* – mental states with truth-evaluable content, which in some way represent something as the case – at all.

Second, it means more of a focus on our use of representational words, words like ‘true’, ‘false’, ‘belief’, ‘represents’. Price wants to turn our gaze back onto these words, the very words non-representationalists want to eschew in their explanations of language. If globalism is right, we will need a fresh explanation of our use of these words. This is because we cannot explain any applications of these in terms of representational features: we cannot say that we use the term ‘refers’ *because* some terms refer to things. This would be invoking a general word-world relation (reference) to explain the term ‘refers’, and globalism rules this out.

Instead, once we accept globalism we need to start again, giving the distinctive ‘what it does and why it’s there’ theory for representational words themselves, not just ethical and modal ones for instance. However, whatever explanation we give here must be compatible with our local non-representationalist theories: whatever theory we give of, say, the use of ‘true’, ‘false’, and ‘belief’ had better be compatible with the fact that ethical language expresses attitudes, that probability language expresses credences, and so on for whatever local theories we think are plausible.

Price thinks localists like Blackburn will give a complex non-representationalist story to explain why we use the term ‘represents’ as applied to ethical language, but think that in *genuine* cases no complex explanation is required: we say that ‘Socrates’ refers to Socrates *because* ‘Socrates’ does genuinely refer to Socrates. Accepting globalism means recognising that the

latter is no explanation at all.

So for Price, accepting globalism means appreciating that we cannot simply explain some words in terms of their referents, or in terms of what they represent, because we already know this won't do. Price offers several different alternatives, including his own (1988) account of truth, and Robert Brandom's (1994; 2008) inferentialist account of assertion and propositional content. It might seem, then, that localists must follow, and give up the idea that other kinds of language can easily be explained in representational terms.

This might seem like a radical overhaul for localism, but it isn't. It is true that Blackburn sounds as though he thinks that in cases which need representationalist treatment, the explanations will be simple:

If we insisted instead on posing the ... question: how come that we go in for descriptions of the world in terms of surrounding middle-sized dry goods? – then the answer is only going to be the flat-footed stutter or self-pat on the back: it is because we are indeed surrounded by middle sized dry goods. ... It is because it is no better than a stutter that I call it flat-footed representationalism. (Blackburn, 2013, pp.78-79)

Here Blackburn is claiming that in representationalist cases, we can only 'stutter'. Price argues that things will not be as simple as saying: we use 'tree' because there are trees. We will still need a general theory of assertion and propositional content, and in any case even exploring the way middle-sized dry goods-talk works will not obviously be trivial and simple (Price, 2015a, pp.150-151).

However, this doesn't imply that the right theory of assertion has to be significantly different from any orthodox ones of the kind a localist may believe. It doesn't block a psychologistic theory of meaning on which assertions get their content from the mental states they express, so long as we can give a suitably non-representationalist account of those mental states. Indeed this idea seems to be implicit in Price and Macarthur's defence of Price's (1988; 2003) theory:

The proposal starts with the thought that many of our protolinguistic psychological states might be such that it is would be advantageous, with respect to those states, that we tend to towards conformity across our communities. Assertoric language seems

to facilitate and encourage such alignment—within the Assertion Game, we give voice to our psychological dispositions in ways which invite challenges by speakers with contrary dispositions. (‘That’s false’ and ‘That’s true’ are markers of challenge and concession, respectively—cf. Price (1988, 2003)). (Macarthur & Price, 2007, p.248)

In other words, we explain assertion as expressing (‘giving voice’) to psychological states, and say *why* we’d do this – because it is advantageous to do so. However, it’s not obvious how this is a departure from a psychological theory along the lines of, say, Wayne Davis’s view (Davis, 2002), or the kind Gibbard discusses (see §4.3), so long as we make sure that our account of the relevant psychological states isn’t itself a representationalist one. For instance we shouldn’t appeal to the expression of beliefs and leave that category unexplained, or explain it in representational terms. If this is so, localists can accept Price’s globalism without overhauling their general approach to explaining meaning.

4.7 Conclusion

I’ll now sum up my argument in this chapter. I’ve discussed the debate between local and global non-representationalism. I’ve read these views in terms of *explanatory scepticism*: localists think that some language and thought is not to be explained in terms of representational features, and globalists think that *no* language and thought is to be explained in this way. Price offers two arguments that localism collapses into globalism: these are based on the success of local views, and the implications of minimalism.

However, things aren’t this simple: we need to make sense of what representational features are. Once we do this, we get an interesting result. Localists think they are relations between thought and language and its subject matter, though as we saw they read this more strictly than I do. Globalists think they are *general* relations between thought and language and the world. Only this reading of representational features, I argued, allows globalism to be plausible. However, this reading also entails an interesting result: that localists *already* accept the globalists’ globalism, and globalists *already* accept the localists’ localism! As such the debate between the two views is empty, a mere verbal debate about what features count as representational. Moreover, Price’s two arguments fail to push localism anywhere new: the

arguments either have false premises about the impact of non-representationalism, or else localists will consider them invalid and irrelevant because they understand representational features differently. All this is due to the difference between globalists' and localists' views of what representational features are.

Having established this, I then looked at some consequences for localism and globalism. I argued that while Price claims localists need to overhaul their general approach to explaining meaning, this doesn't follow: even if localists do appreciate that they're already committed to globalism, this doesn't have much impact on their view.

This result allows us to answer the worry from the end of the previous chapter: that if ethical expressivists accept minimalism, they stop themselves being representationalists about other areas of language. This is essentially Price's point. But we've seen that it doesn't go through: minimalism only rules out using *general* representational features, ones that hold between things in the world and each term of a given kind. For expressivists like Blackburn and Gibbard, this doesn't rule out being representationalists about some kinds of language, since for them representationalism involves ascribing not general relations but relations between terms and their subject matter. Minimalism doesn't affect this.

The discussion in the last two chapters shows that by paying careful attention to the core views of non-representationalism, and to what minimalist theories of representational features actually involve, we can resolve two recent and prominent debates about non-representationalism. In the next two chapters, I'm going to apply the same strategy to investigate one major theme in the discussion of non-representationalism, namely the impact of non-representationalism on metaphysics. Writers have made various claims about whether non-representationalism impacts metaphysical inquiry; in the next two chapters I will explore these in detail, and argue that non-representationalism's impact is largely overstated.

CHAPTER 5

DEFLATIONISM AND TRUTHMAKING

5.1 Introduction

In the last three chapters I have focused on making sense of non-representationalism, and applying my understanding of it to two important debates in the literature. In this chapter and the next I will turn to a different question: what impact does non-representationalism have on metaphysics?

The idea that non-representationalism affects metaphysical enquiry is common in the literature. Many writers argue that non-representationalism in some way undermines metaphysical investigations into the nature of various facts and properties. One strand of metaphysics thought to be affected is truthmaker theory, the project of specifying things in the world which make certain truths true. This project includes investigating the nature of certain kinds of facts and properties. For instance, some metaphysicians of modality ask whether purely *actual* entities can make true statements about non-actual possibilities. Answering this question involves asking whether actual entities can do this job, and if not then what kinds of entities can. Other philosophers ask whether natural facts and properties can be truthmakers for normative statements; the result of this inquiry determines whether or not we are naturalists about the normative.

Both supporters and critics of non-representationalism have argued that it undermines truthmaker theory in some way. For instance, Simon Blackburn takes his non-representationalist view of ethical language to obviate the project of finding truthmakers for ethical statements, and of asking questions about ethical properties and facts. Blackburn identifies his metaphysical opponent like so:

... the truth-theoretic approach identifies its problems in terms of questions of the form ‘what is the ‘truth-maker’ or the fact

involved in something or other?’ ... This is the paradigm that has dominated recent philosophy to the point at which other approaches are invisible to many writers. (Blackburn, 2015, p.850)

He argues that his non-representationalist approach is an alternative, and once we accept it, ‘metaphysics bows out of the picture’.

The following two chapters are about whether non-representationalism does undermine metaphysics. There are several different ways this might happen, which I divide into two categories. First is the impact of what non-representationalists say about representational features: their explanatory scepticism, as I’m calling it. Second is non-representationalists’ commitment to deflationary views about truth, reference, facts and properties. Both local and global non-representationalists accept such views.

In this chapter I will focus on the second of these, leaving the first for the next chapter. My focus here is on how deflationary views affect truthmaker theory: what should a deflationist say about truthmaking? Some have argued that deflationism opposes truthmaking, by making truthmaking questions incoherent and so unanswerable, or avoidable, or trivial. I am going to argue that this is mostly false. Deflationists can and should accept that many truthmaking questions are coherent, not trivial, and not avoidable. However, I will argue that deflationists do have reason to reject some elements of mainstream truthmaker theory, so it does make some difference. The important point is that deflationism’s limited impact on truthmaker theory is not strong enough to allow non-representationalists, who accept deflationism, to reject truthmaker theory wholesale.

The structure of this chapter is as follows. In §5.2 I introduce deflationism about truth. In §5.3 then introduce the basic idea of truthmaking, show how deflationists can make sense of truthmakers, and say why they should believe in them. In §5.4 I explain how deflationists should think about the role of facts and properties in truthmaker debates, and argue that these things pose no problem to deflationists. In §§5.5-5.6 I then answer three arguments from non-representationalists that deflationism blocks truthmaking in some way: Price argues that deflationism stops truthmaker questions arising in the first place; Blackburn argues that deflationism gives truthmaker questions trivial answers; and both Price and Blackburn argue that deflationism makes truthmaker questions *first-order* and so non-metaphysical. I show that these arguments all fail. I conclude

that deflationism makes little difference to truthmaking debates, and so non-representationalism does not avoid such debates in virtue of its commitment to deflationism.

5.2 Deflationism about truth

The key idea behind deflationism about truth is that truth is not a philosophically useful concept. It does no explanatory work. There are many different kinds of deflationism, but the most popular among non-representationalists is Paul Horwich's view (Horwich, 1998b), which I will therefore take to be representative. The core deflationist claim is that our grasp of the concept of truth is exhausted by our disposition to infer according to the 'T-schema' (where ' $\langle p \rangle$ ' denotes the proposition that p):

$$(T) \quad \langle p \rangle \text{ is true if and only if } p$$

and that the collected instances of this schema form the most basic or fundamental facts about truth.¹ The instances themselves are basic – they are not derived from or explained by anything else. Deflationists think that all the facts involving truth can be explained on the basis of this schema plus other facts not about truth (Horwich, 1998b, Ch.1).

Alongside this central negative claim, deflationists argue that we have the concept of truth, and the truth predicate ' \dots is true', in order to formulate claims we couldn't easily formulate otherwise. For instance, suppose I want to agree with what Ella said this morning, but can't remember what she said, other than that I agree. The truth predicate lets me agree with her by saying: 'What Ella said this morning is true'. The same goes for other cases where we want to assert a claim without knowing its content, like when I say 'Fermat's Last Theorem is true'. The truth predicate also lets us make generalisations, like 'Everything Ella said is true'. The truth predicate lets us express these claims by giving us the means to assert a claim by predicating truth of it.

For our purposes, however, the most important feature of deflationism is that it takes the instances of (T) as the basic facts about truth, and indeed the

¹ There are various issues here to do with the Liar paradox, since we don't take my grasp of truth to require me to believe that a proposition P , defined as the proposition ' P is false', is true if and only if P is false. However as I'm not asking whether deflationism is true, and as these issues do not affect any of my discussion of truthmaking, I will disregard them, and understand the disposition to infer according to (T) to be restricted to non-paradoxical instances.

disposition to infer according to it as constitutive of grasp of the concept of truth. This means that the instances of (T) are not derived from any other principle about truth. More specifically, deflationists reject *any* theory of truth which takes the form

$$x \text{ is true iff } x \text{ is } F$$

For instance: x is true iff x corresponds to a fact, or x is true iff x is a member of some ideally coherent set, or iff x is useful to believe, and so on. Deflationists think that *all it takes* for a proposition like $\langle \text{grass is green} \rangle$ to be true is for grass to be green, and the same goes for all propositions. Moreover, this fact is basic and not explained by anything else, like the proposition's correspondence or utility or membership in a coherent set.

5.3 Truthmaking

The basic idea of a truthmaker is simple: it's something which makes a truth true. Here 'makes' is not to be read causally: a truthmaker is not something which causes a truth to be true. Rather, most read it in terms of the phrase 'in virtue of': a truthmaker is something in virtue of which a truth is true. Most truthmaker theorists take this to involve explanation: a truthmaker explains any truth it makes true. Most truthmaker theorists also think a truthmaker must *necessitate* the relevant truth: necessarily, if the truthmaker exists, then the truth is true.

The notion of explaining a truth is ambiguous. Consider the question of what explains the truth of $\langle \text{grass is green} \rangle$. This can be read in two ways. First it could be read as asking what explains the fact that grass is green, or in other words asking why grass is green. Second, it could be read as asking what it is for $\langle \text{grass is green} \rangle$ to be true, asking what it takes for that proposition to have the property of being true. This question is focused on the proposition itself: it asks what that proposition needs to be like to be true. For instance, a coherentist may say that for $\langle \text{grass is green} \rangle$ to be true is for it to be a member of some special maximal coherent set of propositions.

A nice way to understand this is to distinguish between two ways of using words like 'truth' and 'truths'. In the first sense, a truth is a true truthbearer, a thing which has the property *being true*. If you think that inscriptions of sentences are truthbearers, then in this sense you can write down a truth, hold it in your hand, and then tear it in half. In the second sense, there is no bearer in sight: a truth is just a way the world is. In this

sense a truth is not a thing, a truthbearer, which is true. It is just a way things are. You cannot hold or tear up a truth in this sense. In a world without truthbearers, there would be no truths in the first sense, but plenty of truths in the second sense. The second sense is what we mean when we talk about *the truth*: we're talking about what is the case, not a single true truthbearer!

The two ways of explaining a truth correspond to this distinction. We can explain a truth by explaining why something is so. For instance, we can explain the truth that grass is green by explaining why grass is green. This treats truth in the bearerless sense. In the second sense, we explain a truth by explaining why a truthbearer has the property *being true*. Our focus is on the truthbearer itself.

Peter Schulte (2011) draws on Benjamin Schnieder's (2006) notion of close explanations to make sense of the ambiguity in explaining truths. Schnieder defines closeness in terms of chains of explanation. Suppose p because q , and q because r . Then, ignoring the grammar a little, we can say that q is a closer explanation of p than r is, since q is in some sense between p and r in the explanatory chain.² For instance, a functionalist may say that someone has a mental state M because they have a functional state F , which they have because they have a brain state B . For the functionalist, F is a closer explanation of M than B is. Moreover, for the functionalist F is the *closest* explanation of M : there is nothing between M and F which mediates the explanation.

Note here that typically a very close explanation will *not* specify what we might call the ultimate or most illuminating explanation of a truth. For instance, the functionalist thinks that mental state M is explained by functional state F , and she will think that this is the closest possible explanation: someone has M because they have F , but this explanation isn't mediated by anything else. This is because at the most basic level, to have M is to have F . However, this close explanation is not the ultimate explanation of M , because F itself might need explanation, perhaps in terms of the brain state B or something else, and these may in turn need explanations in terms of other states.

Closeness, therefore, concerns what following Schulte we might call

² Instead you may want to say that the fact that q is a closer explanation of the fact that p than the fact that r is. This wouldn't commit you to facts as such; it's just grammatical convenience. Alternatively we could talk in terms of propositions: $\langle q \rangle$ is a closer explanation of $\langle p \rangle$, again for grammatical convenience.

very *simple* explanations. These explanations are not simple in the sense that they specify simple or basic truths which explain others. Instead they are simple in the sense that the explanations *themselves* are not explained by others. Saying that someone has M because they have F is a very simple explanation because nothing explains it. But the fact that someone has F is not a simple or basic fact – it can be explained in terms of other things. A close *explanation* is simple, but its *explanans* need not be simple.

Schulte points out that we can understand the less common reading of explaining a truth, the one which focuses on truthbearers and their possession of the property *being true*, in terms of closeness (2011, pp.418ff). The closest explanation of ⟨grass is green⟩'s truth will tell us *what it is* for that proposition to be true. It gives us the most basic thing we can say about the proposition's truth, the explanation which itself is not explicable.

This contrasts with less close explanations. For instance, suppose we think that the closest explanation of ⟨grass is green⟩'s truth is that grass is green. (This is what deflationists think, as we'll see shortly.) Then we can give less close explanations of ⟨grass is green⟩'s truth by explaining why grass is green. Suppose we want to do this in terms of a collection of truths about pieces of grass, chlorophyll, and so on. Then our explanation will form a more distant explanation of ⟨grass is green⟩'s truth.

On this basis, Schulte distinguishes two kinds of truthmaker explanations. He points out that the following two explanations are different in an important way:

- (1) ⟨Aristotle exists⟩ is true because Aristotle exists
- (2) ⟨Bertie believes Jeeves is clever⟩ is true because Bertie has a state F with a given functional role

While both of these explanations may be true, Schulte points out that the first explanation is essentially about the proposition concerned, while the second isn't.

We can see this by replacing each proposition with the relevant (bearerless) truth:

- (3) Aristotle exists because Aristotle exists
- (4) Bertie believes Jeeves is clever because Bertie has a state F with a given functional role

The former becomes false but the latter remains true. Schulte argues that this shows us that (1) is essentially about the proposition ⟨Aristotle exists⟩ and so concerns *what it is* for that proposition to be true. (2) on the other hand is not essentially about the proposition, since it remains true once the proposition is removed.

In our terms, Schulte's distinction between simple and substantial truthmaker explanations corresponds with the distinction between a truth as a true truthbearer and a truth as a way the world is. Simple truthmaker explanations essentially concern true truthbearers; substantial ones primarily concern bearerless truths. We can understand this distinction in terms of closeness: simple explanations are the closest explanations of truthbearer truth, while substantial ones are more distant, since their main focus is on explaining bearerless truths which in turn explain the truth of truthbearers.

Schnieder and Schulte therefore argue that truthmaker explanations like

⟨grass is green⟩ is true in virtue of its truthmaker *g*

Are best read as *series* of explanations, involving two components:

- (i) ⟨grass is green⟩ is true in virtue of grass's being green and
- (ii) grass is green in virtue of *g*'s existence

As Schulte points out, these combine two elements: the explanation of a truthbearer's being true in terms of a bearerless truth, and the explanation of that truth in terms of another, namely that *g* exists.³

What will a deflationist have to say about all this? Well, for her, the closest possible explanation of the truth of ⟨grass is green⟩ is that grass is green, and the same goes for all propositions, since the instances of the T-schema are the most fundamental facts about truth. There is some controversy about whether deflationists can agree that ⟨grass is green⟩ is true *because* grass is green. I follow Schnieder (2006) and Künne (2003, pp.148ff) in taking this to be a conceptual explanation, similar to when we say that Bertie is Angela's cousin *because* one of Bertie's parents is a sibling of one of Angela's parents. ⟨grass is green⟩ is true because grass is green, and this is so because it is an elucidation of the *concept* of truth. No deeper explanation

³ Schulte talks in terms of facts instead of bearerless truths. I've changed this because 'fact' usually means either (i) an existing complex entity, which Armstrong calls a state of affairs, and some people call a Tractarian fact, or (ii) a true proposition. Neither of these lines up with truths in the bearerless sense, ways the world is, which is what I'm talking about here.

of this is available. Conversely, just as it's false that one of Bertie's parents is a sibling of one of Angela's parents *because* Bertie is Angela's cousin, it's false that grass is green because $\langle \text{grass is green} \rangle$ is true, since we do not need the concept of truth to elucidate the concepts of grass and greenness.⁴

As such, for the deflationist the only way a truthmaker, say *g*, can explain a proposition's truth is in a more distant way, by explaining a bearerless truth, namely that grass is green. Any true claim of the form

$\langle \text{grass is green} \rangle$ is true in virtue of *g*'s existence

is true only because

Grass is green in virtue of *g*'s existence

is also true. Truthmaking explanations can *never* be closer than those given to us by the T-schema: there is nothing 'in between' grass's being green and $\langle \text{grass is green} \rangle$'s truth in the explanatory chain.

For the deflationist, then, truthmaking primarily concerns explanations of (bearerless) truths by other (bearerless) truths, where the latter concern truthmakers. In other words, truthmaking is concerned with explaining why things are so. As Horwich puts it:

... we should appreciate that the basic content of a truthmaker theory is formulated by propositions of the form "p because of x" or "p because x exists" (Horwich, 2008, p.273)

For instance, a truthmaker theory for philosophy of mind specifies objects in virtue of which (bearerless) truths about the mind hold. Or in other words, it explains truths about various mental phenomena.⁵

Note that this doesn't mean a truthmaker theory has to be specific, making claims about individual truths one at a time. A functionalist may well make specific truthmaker claims about the mind, saying that some specific person has a specific mental state in virtue of their having a specific functional state. But she may also go more general, for instance saying that *any* thinker with *any* mental state of a given kind has it in virtue of their having some functional state of a given kind.

⁴ This answer is controversial – see Liggins (2016). However I won't discuss this further, since I'm only interested in the impact of a correct form of deflationism. Therefore I'll grant for the sake of argument that deflationism can accept that $\langle \text{grass is green} \rangle$ is true because grass is green.

⁵ See also McFetridge (1990).

So, to conclude, a deflationist can believe in truthmakers. They are objects in virtue of which bearerless truths hold. By explaining these bearerless truths, they explain the truth of various truthbearers. This explanation is always more distant, because it is always mediated by the basic truth found in the T-schema: $\langle \text{grass is green} \rangle$ is true because grass is green. The more central claims of truthmaker theory are non-causal explanations of various bearerless truths, and deflationists will accept that there are such explanations.

But *should* a deflationist believe in truthmakers, and get involved in truthmaker theory? At first sight we might think they shouldn't. For truthmaker theory is often motivated by considerations about truthbearers, and in particular by ideas close to the correspondence of truth. Armstrong claims that truthmaker theory is just a development of the correspondence theory of truth:

Anybody who is attracted to the Correspondence theory of truth should be drawn to the truthmaker. Correspondence demands a correspondent, and a correspondent for a truth is a truthmaker. (Armstrong, 1997, p.14)

The major difference between the truthmaker principle and previous versions of the correspondence theory of truth is that the relation between truths and truthmakers isn't one-one. One truth can be made true by many different things – each human makes true $\langle \text{humans exist} \rangle$ – and many truths can be made true by one thing – Ramsey makes true $\langle \text{Ramsey exists} \rangle$, $\langle \text{Humans exist} \rangle$, $\langle \text{Ramsey exists or humans exist} \rangle$, and so on.

Alex Oliver and Fraser MacBride agree with Armstrong's idea. Oliver claims that the truthmaker principle is

a sanitised version of a correspondence theory of truth, shorn of the unworkable idea of truth as a kind of pictorial resemblance, but retaining the doctrine that the world is independent of linguistic description and must be a certain way in order for a given sentence to be true of it (Oliver, 1996, p.69)

MacBride claims that the principle

is what remains once the specific determinations of the correspondence theory have been given up. (MacBride, 2013, p.687)

Here we see the idea that the truthmaker principle, that all truths have truthmakers, is a version of the correspondence theory of truth, which deflationists of course reject. If this is right, deflationists will want to reject this principle.

An important idea here is that the truthmaker principle that every truth has a truthmaker specifies a truthmaking *relation* between true truthbearers and things in the world, and this is unacceptable to deflationists. Gonzalo Rodriguez-Pereyra argues that truthmaking is an asymmetric relation holding between ‘a true proposition and a thing in the world’, and on this basis that ‘truth is a relational property of propositions’ (2005, p.26). He points out that this links truthmaker theory closely to correspondence theories of truth (2005, n.12 p.26). MacBride concurs, arguing that ‘The truthmaker principle is an expression of the general idea that truth is a relation to something worldly’ (2013, p.687). Indeed, MacBride opens his Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy survey article (MacBride, 2016) by saying that it is ‘agreed’ that ‘ x makes it true that p ’ denotes ‘a relation borne to a truth-bearer by something else, a truth-maker’.

This relational idea seems incompatible with deflationism. Armstrong claims that deflationism commits us to

the conclusion that there really is no truth relation that holds between the true proposition and the world. This, though, challenges the realistic insight that there is a world that exists independently of our thoughts and statements, making the latter true or false. One is driven back to the Correspondence theory. (Armstrong, 1997, p.128)

He says this is because deflationism says that ‘attaching the truth predicate to a proposition does not add anything to the mere assertion of that proposition’.

The key idea here is that to believe in truthmakers is to believe in a relation between true truthbearers and the world, and this is not acceptable to a deflationist, because she cannot accept that truth is such a relation, since this goes above and beyond the instances of the T-schema which tell us only that any proposition $\langle p \rangle$ is true iff p .

However this should not put deflationists off truthmaking. For the deflationist can believe in a truthmaking relation without believing that it gives us a theory of truth. In other words, she can believe in truthmakers,

without thinking that *what it is* for a proposition to be true is to have a truthmaker. She can do this by distinguishing two ways of denying that there's a truth relation between true propositions and the world. First, it is clear that the deflationist does deny that the property *being true* is *constituted* by a relation between a true truthbearer and the world. That is to say, there is no relation R such that:

x is true iff x bears R to (something in) the world

is an *explanation* of what it is to be true. No relation of this kind will explain truth: *a fortiori* no relation between a proposition and its truthmaker will explain the proposition's truth. Partly this is because no such relation will explain the truth of the instances of the T-schema, which deflationists take to be inexplicable, and therefore to give the closest explanation of a proposition's truth.

However, this doesn't mean that there are no relations between truthbearers and truthmakers. The deflationist can admit these relations but take them as *superficial*. To make sense of this let's consider an analogy. Consider the relation R which holds between two objects x and y just in case y is a person taller than Socrates. It is true that, say, Plato bears this relation to Frank Ramsey.⁶ But Plato doesn't bear this relation to Ramsey because of anything about Plato. Indeed *everything* bears this relation to Ramsey. It seems right to say that relation R is a relation, but it's only superficially a relation between the things it relates. This is because ultimately, wherever *a* bears R to *b*, this is not because of what *a* is like, or any relation between *a* and *b*, but because of a relation between *b* and Socrates.

The deflationist can treat truthmaking in this way. Consider $\langle \text{Ramsey is tall} \rangle$ and let *r* be a truthmaker for it. Can the deflationist believe in a truth-making relation between *r* and the proposition? She can argue as follows. For *r* to make true $\langle \text{Ramsey is tall} \rangle$ is for $\langle \text{Ramsey is tall} \rangle$ to be true in virtue of *r*'s existence. But *being true in virtue of* is not a genuine relation between $\langle \text{Ramsey is tall} \rangle$ and *r*. This is because all it takes for $\langle \text{Ramsey is tall} \rangle$ to be true is for Ramsey to be tall. Moreover, this is the most basic thing we can say about what it is for $\langle \text{Ramsey is tall} \rangle$ to be true. As such, for $\langle \text{Ramsey is tall} \rangle$ to be true in virtue of *r*'s existence is just for Ramsey to be tall in virtue of *r*'s existence.

⁶ Frank Ramsey was six foot three, according to his wife Lettice (see Mellor, 1995a, p.253). Interestingly, there is a retired professional basketball player who has the name and height, and to whom Plato therefore also bears this relation.

So the deflationist can believe in the truthmaking relation between an object and a proposition, she just believes that this holds because of the relation between the object and the subject matter of the proposition, and not in virtue of a relation involving the proposition itself. She can accept the truthmaking relation without thinking it explains truth, and hence without taking truth to be a relational property in any sense that conflicts with deflationism.

Moreover, note that the correspondence argument only applies to an *unrestricted* truthmaker principle: that *all* true propositions have truthmakers. But so-called *truthmaker non-maximalists* like Simons (2005) and Mellor (2009) do not believe this unrestricted version: they believe that some but not all true propositions have truthmakers. For instance they normally deny that negative propositions like $\langle \text{Vulcan doesn't exist} \rangle$ have truthmakers, since this proposition is true not because some entity exists but because some entity, namely Vulcan, *doesn't* exist. Non-maximalists cannot think truth *consists* in the truthmaker relation, since they think that some propositions are true yet do not bear this relation to anything.

So we have no reason to think that believing in (i) truthmakers in general or (ii) the unrestricted truthmaker principle entails believing a correspondence theory of truth. As such deflationists can believe in both (i) and (ii) without undermining their deflationary view.

The notion of truth as a relation is very important when we consider the link with non-representationalism. For as we've seen, at the heart of the view is a suspicion of the explanatory role of relations between language and the world. Huw Price nicely sums up the picture non-representationalists reject with his metaphor of the 'matching model', with statements on the left and the world on the right (Price, 2013, ch.2). In the matching game, our aim is to find for each statement on the left a truthmaker on the right.

This game, Price claims, is a simplified version of contemporary linguistically grounded metaphysics. It may at first seem unacceptable to non-representationalists, who are suspicious of the use of relations between words and the world. Moreover, as we've seen some influential truthmaker theorists support this relational picture, where the aim of metaphysics is to find truthmakers to be the worldly relata of the truthmaking relation. Indeed, in his survey article on truthmaking, MacBride claims that '[t]ruth-makers are posited to provide the point of semantic contact whereby true representations touch upon an independent reality, upon something non-repres-

entational' – this sounds very representationalist! So it makes sense that non-representationalists will be suspicious of this idea.

However, as we've seen, the relational picture of truthmaking is at best optional. Contrary to what some truthmaker theorists say, we can do truthmaking without believing that the truth of a proposition *consists in* a truthmaking relation between propositions and the world. So non-representationalists should not consider their deflationary views, nor their general suspicion of word-world relations, to rule out believing in truthmaking. Thinking otherwise involves accepting overly strong views about what truthmaking involves, views which encourage the relational picture Price targets.

The previous argument blocks a bad reason to think deflationists cannot believe in truthmakers. But are there any good reasons to think that deflationists *should* believe in truthmakers? Earlier we saw that a deflationist will only believe a truthmaker claim about a truthbearer on the basis of a truthmaker claim about a bearerless truth. As such, she will only believe the unrestricted truthmaker principle:

(TM) For every proposition $\langle p \rangle$, if $\langle p \rangle$ is true then there is some x such that $\langle p \rangle$ is true in virtue of x 's existence

on the basis of believing the corresponding bearerless principle, which we can express using sentential quantification:

(TM*) For every p , if p then there is some x such that p in virtue of x 's existence

Therefore, the question of whether deflationists should believe in truthmakers comes down to whether they should believe that in general, bearerless truths hold in virtue of existing objects.

To start with, deflationists must reject a common motivation for believing in truthmakers, which relates to the issues raised above about the correspondence theory. The common motivation is that truth is not primitive or brute, but is grounded in or dependent on reality. Rodriguez-Pereyra puts this nicely:

Thus the insight behind the idea of truthmakers is that truth is grounded. In other words, truth is not primitive. If a certain proposition is true, then it owes its truth to something else: its truth is not a primitive, brute, ultimate fact. The truth of a

proposition thus depends on what reality, and in particular its subject matter, is like. What reality is like is anterior to the truth of the proposition, it gives rise to the truth of the proposition and thereby accounts for it. (Rodriguez-Pereyra, 2005, p.21)

Notice that this motivation is all about truthbearers: the truth of *a proposition* is not brute but depends on the world. Earlier we saw similar ideas in Armstrong, MacBride and Oliver, though often cashed out in terms of correspondence theories of truth.

Deflationists will deny that this gives us any further reason to believe in truthmakers. They will accept that the truth of a truthbearer depends on what the world is like. $\langle \text{grass is green} \rangle$ is not just true: it depends on what the world is like, namely on whether grass is green. Indeed nobody will want to deny this. As I argued earlier, deflationists should follow Schnieder and Künne in taking this to be a conceptual fact, holding in virtue of the concept of truth. This is all there is to say about the dependence of truthbearer truth on reality: $\langle \text{grass is green} \rangle$'s truth depends on whether grass is green.

Deflationists will argue that we only need truthmakers to account for this if we need truthmakers to account for bearerless truths, ways the world are. In other words, whether we should believe in truthmakers depends entirely on whether we think that all bearerless truths need hold in virtue of existing objects. And regarding that question, Rodriguez-Pereyra's argument has less force. For while in general, we can agree that *any proposition's* truth is to be explained by a bearerless truth, i.e. for any $\langle p \rangle$, $\langle p \rangle$ is true because p , we needn't also agree that any bearerless truth is to be explained by something.

To see why this is so, consider the idea that there are brute (bearerless) truths, truths which have no explanation. Let us use the sentence letter ' b ' to state such a truth, so b but there is no entity x such that b because x exists. Saying this is completely consistent with also agreeing that the corresponding proposition $\langle b \rangle$ is true because b . So agreeing that truthbearer truth is always explained by the world does not commit us to agreeing that bearerless truth is always explained by the world. And so the deflationist can agree with the truthbearer-focused argument of Rodriguez-Pereyra and others, without thinking this commits her to believing in truthmakers for *all* true truthbearers, since she will only believe this on the grounds of believing in truthmakers for all bearerless truths, and she may reject this.

So, considerations about truthbearers don't give deflationists reason to believe in truthmakers. However, deflationists will of course agree that many truths do have explanations, and in particular that many truths philosophers are interested in have or are likely to have non-causal explanations, for instance truths about modality, morality, the mind, social groups, relations between parts and wholes, time and tense, mathematics, logic, and many other categories. So deflationists have no reason to reject truthmaking as applied to bearerless truths.

It's worth noting that truthmaker theorists often point to cases where truthmakers are said to be needed, but for reasons which have nothing to do with truthbearers. Consider, for instance, Armstrong's argument that the idea that truths need truthmakers shows us what's wrong with phenomenalism and behaviourism (2004, pp.1-3). Armstrong argues that both of these views posit counterfactuals to explain certain phenomena but do not provide truthmakers for those counterfactuals. For instance behaviourists, who think that mental states are just dispositions to behave in certain ways, appeal to unmanifested dispositions to explain unmanifested beliefs, beliefs that never show up in our behaviour. These beliefs are simply unmanifested dispositions, and unmanifested dispositions can be understood in terms of counterfactuals: if stimulus S had occurred, manifestation M would have occurred. This can be so even if S never occurs.

Armstrong claims that Ryle saw 'no need to consider the question of the truthmaker for dispositional truths about minds'. However, once we do ask this question, we find that we need more than behaviour to make true truths about minds. As Armstrong says, 'our view of the nature of mind will very likely be transformed and we will move in a quite un-Rylean direction'. Whatever answer we give, Armstrong says, 'the truthmaker insight ... prevents the metaphysician from letting dispositions 'hang on air' as they do in Ryle's philosophy of mind', which he thinks is the 'ultimate sin' in a realist metaphysics (2004, p.3).

We can make sense of Armstrong's objection without thinking about truthbearers at all. The problem with behaviourism is not that it does not explain what it is for $\langle \text{If } S \text{ had occurred, } M \text{ would have occurred} \rangle$ to be true. Behaviourists will agree with the rest of us: this is true just in case if S had occurred, M would have occurred. (They may add to this if they accept non-deflationary theories of truth.) The problem is that they cannot explain this counterfactual: they cannot say why it holds. They must treat

it as brute, since no amount of actual behaviour can make it true. But what needs to be made true here is primarily a bearerless truth. Behaviourists end up treating a bearerless truth as brute, when that truth seems like it should be explicable.

Horwich claims that Armstrong's truthmaker-based criticism of phenomenalism and behaviourism don't give us any reason to buy into truthmaker theory. He argues that the problem with behaviourism is simply that we should not, as it must, treat truths about dispositions as brute, or as he puts it 'explanatorily fundamental'. But he claims that 'it is perfectly possible to formulate these criticisms without any truthmaking rhetoric', that truthmaking 'merely offers a dressed up way of putting the point', and ultimately that the notion of truth needn't play any role in truthmaking theses at all (Horwich, 2008, pp.272-3).

I think Horwich is right to think that the notion of *truthbearer* truth doesn't play any role here, since Armstrong's concerns can be stated without mentioning truthbearers. However I don't think it follows that Armstrong's points can be formulated without 'truthmaking rhetoric'. Rather, even if we formulate Armstrong's points without talking about truthbearers, we can still count this as truthmaking. For it is still ultimately concerned with what it is in virtue of which certain truths hold. This counts as truthmaking even though it's not about truthbearers.

So in general deflationists have good reason to believe that truths have truthmakers. In particular, they also have good reason to believe that we *need* to specify these, in order to explain those truths. Where truths require explanation, we should explain them. However, deflationists should not believe we need to do this in order to account for truthbearer truth as such, i.e. in order to say what it is for a truthbearer to be true. Rather, we need to do this simply because many (bearerless) truths need explanation. Moreover, there's no reason for deflationists to believe the unrestricted truthmaker principle (TM) since this rules out any brute truths, which deflationists may want to accept. This means deflationists differ from mainstream truthmaker theorists, since those who think *what it is* to be true is to have a truthmaker will have grounds for believing (TM) that deflationists do not.

5.4 Facts and properties

So far I have not discussed what truthmakers themselves are. However, this question is important both for debates within truthmaker theory and for debates about non-representationalism and deflationism, and deflationism does have an interesting impact on it.

So far I have talked about truthmakers as objects simply for convenience of exposition since many truthmaker theorists accept this. However, there are three important points here: (i) not everyone accepts this, (ii) deflationists do not need to, and (iii) there are reasons to think they *shouldn't* think so.

Accepting that truthmakers have to be objects immediately leads us to debates about universals and facts. Armstrong argues for facts or 'states of affairs' as he calls them on this basis (Armstrong, 1997, pp.115-6). Consider a contingent truth like $\langle \text{Ramsey is tall} \rangle$. If we think truthmakers are objects, and we accept the common view that a truthmaker must necessitate a truth it makes true, then the truthmaker for this proposition must be such that necessarily, if it exists, then $\langle \text{Ramsey is tall} \rangle$ is true. So we need to find an object whose existence entails that Ramsey is tall. Ramsey himself won't do: he could have existed while being short. Adding a universal, *being tall*, is a step in the right direction. But it still won't do, since both Ramsey and *being tall* can exist, yet he can fail to instantiate it. So, Armstrong concludes, we need a state of affairs, *Ramsey's being tall* as the truthmaker.

Josh Parsons (1999) and Joseph Melia (2005) have responded to this argument. Parsons denies the assumption that a truthmaker must necessitate any truth it makes true, and hence claims that Ramsey himself can make true $\langle \text{Ramsey is tall} \rangle$ without any help from either a universal or a state of affairs. More relevant for this discussion, Melia denies that truthmakers need to be objects. Or, more precisely, he argues that we don't need *truthmakers* to make sense of truthmaking – his article is called 'Truthmaking without Truthmakers'. Melia argues that truthmaking needn't be a relation between an object and a truthbearer. Instead he wants to treat 'makes true' as a connective like 'and' or 'because', which allows us to specify truthmakers using sentences, for instance by saying

Bertie has F makes it true that Bertie has M

Melia claims that this blocks Armstrong's argument at the first step, and

allows us to adhere to what he calls a ‘sensible nominalism’, the view that only concrete particular objects exist.

These issues are relevant for deflationism and non-representationalism’s acceptance of it. For non-representationalists, and at least some deflationists about truth like Horwich, take a deflationary attitude towards facts and properties, which excludes them from any explanatory role, and *a fortiori* a truthmaking role. For instance, Horwich (2008, p.273) takes facts and properties to be exhausted by the following schemas:

- (5) The fact that p exists because p
- (6) x has the property F-ness or being F because x is F

Horwich therefore thinks that properties and facts cannot explain the truths that truthmakers want them to. For instance, he will deny that Ramsey is tall *because* the fact *Ramsey’s being tall* exists. Rather, that fact exists because Ramsey is tall. Similarly, Ramsey has the property *being tall* because Ramsey is tall, not vice versa.

If truthmakers must be objects, then, it looks like deflationists must reject many common truthmaker explanations, and perhaps accept Parsons’s defence of a nominalistic truthmaker approach. However, this is not so. Deflationists can and will accept Melia’s idea that truthmaking is best understood in terms of a connective. For as we saw, deflationists will deny that the truthmaking relation is really a relation, in any more than a superficial sense. As such, they are under no pressure whatsoever to think that truthmakers must be objects, on the grounds that only if they’re objects can they stand in the truthmaking relation. Instead, deflationists can argue, as Melia does, that truthmaker theses are simply explanations of one (bearerless) truth in terms of another. In general, they take the form:

p because q

where ‘because’ is not causal, but the ‘in virtue of’ kind of explanation. This doesn’t stop deflationists accepting that particular objects can do truthmaking work, since there will be some cases where ‘q’ is replaced by a claim about something’s existence. But deflationists need not think this will always be so.

So deflationists needn’t accept that truthmakers must be objects. Instead they can take truthmaking theses to be explanations of one (bearerless) truth in terms of another. In fact, this is closer to what many metaphysicians call

grounding (see e.g. Correia & Schnieder, 2012). Horwich supports roughly this idea, arguing in favour of

a sanitized version of truthmaker theory—a version that is not focused on [truthbearer] truth *per se*, and that does not attempt to explain everything in terms of what exists, but which is concerned simply with the ways in which various kinds of phenomena are to be explained ... and with which of them must (or may, or may not) be regarded as explanatorily basic. Indeed, many of truthmaker theory's characteristic concerns and claims seem quite reasonable if they are understood as part of such an inquiry. (Horwich, 2008, p.271)

Horwich argues for this on the basis of (i) a rejection of facts and properties as explanatorily prior to (bearerless) truths, and (ii) a rejection of truthmaker theory as a theory of truth – the two themes I've been discussing in this chapter.

However, it's also important to note that deflationists about facts and properties can still talk about facts and properties in truthmaking claims. For many truthmaking debates are concerned with whether a certain range of truths can be explained in terms of another, without worrying how to explain the latter. We may say that mental truths are made true by physical facts or properties, without being serious about facts and properties. For what we really mean is that mental truths are made true by physical truths. Perhaps in explaining physical truths we will eventually need facts and properties, or at least we will need to debate with Armstrong and other realists about them. But it is harmless to talk about them at these higher levels, since we're not concerned with explaining those physical truths, only with explaining mental truths in terms of them.

Moreover, we shouldn't think that deflationism blocks debates about nominalism and universals in general. There are plenty of other things to say in that debate which don't rely on the specific notion of truthmakers as entities as motivated by thinking of truthmaking as a relation.

To sum up, deflationists can accept truthmaking claims as explanations of (bearerless) truths, whether or not those explanations ultimately specify objects. Moreover they should therefore think that we *need* to specify truthmakers for truths which need explanations. This is not because of issues

about the nature of truth, but a more mundane fact: truths need explanations. We've seen that deflationism does have some limited impact on truthmaker theory, for instance not requiring that truthmakers be objects, and blocking certain reasons for believing in truthmaking. However, in general deflationism is compatible with the intelligibility of truthmaking questions, their answerability, and the need to answer them.

5.5 Avoiding truthmaker questions

So far we've seen how deflationists can make sense of truthmaking and why they should believe in it. Huw Price (2013, ch.1) argues, however, that deflationism undermines metaphysicians' motivations for asking truthmaking questions in the first place. His argument is simple. Truthmaking questions about sentences are appropriate only if they are genuinely *about* those sentences. If deflationism is true, truthmaking questions are not genuinely about the sentences in question. So if deflationism is true, truthmaking questions are inappropriate.⁷

Price starts with the assumption that truthmaking questions are initially motivated by facts about human language (2013, p.8). For instance, we note that humans say: 'torture is wrong', and this motivates us to ask about the truthmaker for this sentence. (This is the matching game I mentioned in my discussion of relationality in §5.3.) Price's assumption is that this is the basic motivation for our truthmaking questions. I won't challenge this assumption in this chapter at all, though we will return to it in the next chapter.

Price argues that questions about truthmakers for sentences are only appropriate if they are genuinely about those sentences (2013, p.9). That is, if we think of the sentences humans use as the data in our metaphysical investigation, then asking questions about their truthmakers is only an appropriate reaction to that data if those questions really are about the data, the sentences themselves.

By analogy consider the strange property *being such that grass is green*. All actual objects have this property. In particular, the English name 'Ramsey' has this property. But saying so isn't really saying anything about the name 'Ramsey', like saying that it has six letters. Instead, it's just another

⁷ Price includes not only questions about truthmakers but questions about referents for terms, for instance what object '3' refers to, and what property 'is good' picks out. I'll ignore this extra element here, since my conclusions about truthmaking apply to it too.

way of saying that grass is green. Now suppose our linguistic data comes in: humans use the term 'Ramsey'. If we then ask whether this has the property of being such that grass is green, this isn't an appropriate reaction to that data. It's not about the term at all. On the other hand, there are questions we can ask about 'Ramsey' which are genuinely about it, for instance about its etymology, pronunciation, syntax, and so on.

Price claims that if deflationism is right, then questions about truthmakers are like questions about *being such that grass is green*. He claims this is because deflationism entails that ascriptions of truth to sentences aren't really about the sentences concerned, but are covert *uses* of those sentences (2013, p.9). For instance, deflationism entails that saying that 'Ramsey is tall' is true is saying nothing more than that Ramsey is tall. Saying Ramsey is tall isn't saying anything about language at all, it's saying something about Ramsey and his height. This idea is common in the deflationist literature and non-representationalists' discussion of it. According to Price, this means that questions about truthmakers for sentences aren't actually about those sentences, since asking what makes true 'Ramsey is tall' is no more than asking what makes Ramsey tall. Asking about the truthmaker for a sentence is like asking whether it has the property *being such that grass is green*.

Therefore, if deflationism is right, truthmaking questions aren't really about language at all. And as such, they are not appropriate reactions in our metaphysical enquiry, since we're assuming that this enquiry starts with data about language use. So while as we've seen deflationism allows truthmaking claims, Price concludes that it entails that they're not in fact well motivated. Instead, he thinks deflationism leads us to ask the distinctive non-representationalist questions about the relevant language: what does it do, and why is it there?

Price's argument rests on the assumption that metaphysical enquiry begins with facts about language. I will not discuss this here. This is because in the next chapter I will discuss several other arguments which begin with this premise, so it is more fruitful to discuss it there. Moreover, I think even with this assumption, Price's argument fails. This is because deflationism does not entail that truthmaker claims are not really about the sentences concerned. And nor should it.

First consider ascriptions like

In English, the sentence 'Ramsey is tall' is true

where we know the content of the sentence concerned. What is it for this claim to be genuinely about the sentence ‘Ramsey is tall’? A good answer is that it is for its truth to depend on what that sentence, that linguistic object, is like. For consider again the property *being such that grass is green*. An ascription of this property to an object is not about that object, because its truth is entirely independent of what that object is like. It is either true of all objects or false of all objects. The fact that the ascription’s truth doesn’t depend on what the object is like is good reason to think it is not really about that object.

However, the truth ascription above is not like this: its truth does depend on what the sentence ‘Ramsey is tall’ is like. For a start, its truth depends on what ‘Ramsey is tall’ *means*. If ‘Ramsey is tall’ meant *Ramsey is short*, it would be false and so would the truth ascription. Moreover, we could replace it with another sentence and get a falsehood, since in English, the sentence ‘Socrates is tall’ is not true. So the truth of the ascription clearly does depend on what ‘Ramsey is tall’ is like. So there’s good reason to think that this ascription is genuinely about that sentence, and more generally that truth ascriptions really are about the sentences concerned.

What about the idea that to ascribe truth to a sentence is to use it? This idea is entirely compatible with the view that truth ascriptions are *also* genuinely about the sentence. Truth ascriptions both use and mention the relevant term. Saying that in English, ‘Ramsey is tall’ is true, is to use the sentence ‘Ramsey is tall’ and say something about it: it is about Ramsey, his height, *and* an English sentence. Price thinks that deflationism says that such ascriptions only *look* like mentions, but are really just uses. The right answer is that they are both. If deflationism conflicts with this fact, we have good reason to doubt deflationism. However as we’ll now see, deflationists don’t deny this.

Start by considering Horwich, who thinks that propositions are the primary bearers of truth. As such, he thinks that truth ascriptions like the one above involve ascriptions of *meaning* to the relevant sentence, and are best read like so:

For some p: in English, ‘Ramsey is tall’ expresses the proposition that p,
and p

or in other words: in English, ‘Ramsey is tall’ expresses a true proposition. So truth ascriptions to sentences are genuinely about those sentences.

Similarly, Quine, who is Price's exemplar deflationist, thinks that truth ascriptions are genuinely about the sentences concerned. Quine differs from Horwich in taking sentences to be the primary truthbearers, and thinking that the claim that 'Ramsey is tall' is true is itself an assertion of the quoted sentence and is therefore equivalent to it – no meaning ascription is required. However, as we already saw, that a truth ascription counts as a use of the sentence doesn't entail that it isn't about that sentence. And as Stephen Gross (2015) has argued in a closely related exchange with Claire Horisk (2007), on Quine's own terms, truth ascriptions are genuinely about the sentences concerned.

This is because Quine thinks that if replacing a singular term by a coreferring term preserves truth-value, then that singular term is performing its usual referring function. For instance, replacing 'Ramsey' with 'the prover of Ramsey's theorem' preserves truth-value in the above ascription, since 'the prover of Ramsey's theorem is tall' is true. Gross points out that this holds for the phrase "Ramsey is tall", the name of the sentence. Suppose we take 'my favourite sentence' to be coreferential with this. Then

In English, my favourite sentence is true

remains true. And so in the original ascription, "Ramsey is tall" is performing its usual referring function, of referring to the sentence 'Ramsey is tall'. So it really is about that sentence, and is not *just* a use of it.

The same holds of other truth ascriptions where we don't know the content of the sentence. For instance, I may want to say that Ella's funniest remark was true (perhaps it was funny because it was true), though I can't remember what she said. This will get the same verdict from Horwich and Quine: it really is about what Ella said, because its truth depends on what Ella said. Even if this also counts as a use of the sentence – for instance, we might think that my remark commits me to agreeing with whatever Ella turned out to have said – it certainly is about that sentence.

So deflationism doesn't entail that truth ascriptions aren't really about the sentences involved, and hence that truthmaker questions and claims aren't really about the sentences involved either. This means that they are well motivated by linguistic data: they really are *about* the data we're given. Or more precisely, this shows that we shouldn't accept Price's reason for thinking deflationism makes them not well motivated. Deflationism doesn't have the impact Price argues for it.

5.6 Triviality and first-order claims

So far, we've seen that deflationism doesn't make truthmaking questions unintelligible or avoidable. However, some have argued that deflationism makes truthmaking claims trivial. If this is right, then we could argue that deflationists have no particular need to answer truthmaking questions, because their answers are trivial and not of philosophical interest.

The idea is that deflationism restricts us to saying that what makes a proposition like $\langle \text{Ramsey is tall} \rangle$ true is that Ramsey is tall, and there's nothing more to be said here. The same goes for what components of propositions refer to: $\langle \text{Ramsey} \rangle$ picks out Ramsey and $\langle \text{is tall} \rangle$ picks out tallness. Simon Blackburn argues for this idea:

There is a story to be written, in this view, about the ethical proposition, and how it holds its place as a focus for discussion and thought. But there is no last chapter to be written about 'what makes such a proposition true'. There is nothing occult or Platonic or mysterious waiting to puzzle us, but also no need to struggle with implausible reductions in order to find 'naturalistic' truth-conditions. If a David Armstrong or a David Lewis comes along demanding a 'truth-maker' we can profit from deflationism, and simply say that what makes it true that honesty is good is that honesty is good. Nothing else needs to be said, wearing allegedly metaphysical hats, or allegedly scientific hats. (Blackburn, 2012, p.195)

Blackburn's idea is that deflationism makes these questions trivial and so irrelevant: what makes it true that honesty is good is that honesty is good, and this we already knew. Huw Price also suggests something similar (2009, p.266).

However, this argument doesn't work, because while deflationism only *supplies* trivial answers to these questions, it doesn't *block* non-trivial ones. For instance, it tells us that $\langle \text{honesty is good} \rangle$ is true iff honesty is good, and that this is the closest explanation of the proposition's truth, in Schnieder's sense. But it doesn't tell us why honesty might be good – in virtue of what this is so. It doesn't rule out there being anything more informative to say about this: it doesn't falsify in advance all claims of the form 'honesty is good in virtue of ...'. To use a more familiar example, deflationism tell us

that $\langle \text{my glass is full of water} \rangle$ is true iff my glass is full of water; but it doesn't rule out that my glass is full of water in virtue of being full of H_2O , and it doesn't therefore rule out that what makes it true that my glass is full of water is that my glass is full of H_2O . The same goes for the referents of predicates and terms. Deflationism only tells us that 'Hesperus' refers to Hesperus and 'water' refers to water, but doesn't rule out that 'Hesperus' refers to Phosphorous and 'water' refers to H_2O .

This is no problem, because deflationism is a theory of *what it is* for propositions to be true, not a theory of which propositions are true. It's not its job to tell us anything more informative, just as it's not functionalism's job to tell us which states realise the functional roles which settle what it is to be a mental state. So merely thinking about the notion of truth itself won't reveal anything new, but this is not a surprise and doesn't stop us investigating further. Nor does it stop us *having* to investigate further: if truths need explanations, the fact that deflationism doesn't provide us with them is irrelevant.

So deflationism about truth doesn't make truthmaking claims trivial. However, some argue that it makes them *first-order* claims.⁸ For instance, statements about truthmakers for ethical statements are ethical statements – when you make them you're making substantive ethical claims, of the same ethical nature as when you say that torture is bad or charity is good. The claim that there are moral truths is just the claim that some ethical propositions are true, and this just says that some propositions of the form $\langle x \text{ is good} \rangle$, $\langle x \text{ is wrong} \rangle$, and so on, are true. Yet this proposition, if deflationism is right, is nothing more than: for some x , x is good or x is wrong or ..., where the dots include all ethical predicates. Yet this is an ethical claim, albeit a very general one – it is about the moral status of objects in general. It is just as much an ethical claim as the view that all torture is wrong, or that some abortions are permissible, though it is more general.

It's important to note that this isn't because truth ascriptions to moral sentences and propositions aren't genuinely *about* those sentences and propositions. We already saw how deflationism doesn't entail this. Instead the idea is just that saying that $\langle P \rangle$ is true commits you to believing $\langle P \rangle$, if you know its content, or to coming to believe its content once you learn it. Moreover, whether $\langle P \rangle$ is true is settled entirely by whether P . There is

⁸See the above quotation from Simon Blackburn, and also Blackburn (1998, pp.294-6), Kramer (2009, 2017); Dworkin (1996), Price (2011, p.14).

nothing more to whether $\langle \text{torture is wrong} \rangle$ is true than whether torture is wrong.

Price argues that this makes truthmaking non-metaphysical, though he uses a non-ethical example:

Asking “What makes it true that snow is white?”, or “What makes ‘Snow is white’ true?”, is just another way of asking what makes snow white – a reasonable question, in this case, but a question to be answered in terms of the physics of ice and light, not in terms of the metaphysics of facts and states of affairs. There is no additional semantic explanandum, and no distinctively metaphysical question. (Price, 2011, p.14)

Price thinks that deflationism turns truthmaker questions into first-order, non-metaphysical questions. Blackburn agrees, as we saw above when he said ‘Nothing else needs to be said, wearing allegedly metaphysical hats’ (Blackburn, 2012, p.195). The idea is that deflationism collapses metaphysical questions into non-metaphysical ones.

However, the fact that these questions are first-order doesn’t mean they cannot be *metaphysical*. For a start, many metaphysicians will disagree with Price’s claim that asking what makes snow white is to be answered by the physics of ice and light, but not in terms of facts and states of affairs. They will argue that physics will give us a good causal explanation of snow’s being white, but not a constitutive explanation of any of the facts involved. For instance, if the physical explanation of snow’s being white involves citing atomic truths of the form $a \text{ is } F$, metaphysicians like Armstrong will argue that these truths need truthmakers, and the only way of making sense of them involves talking about particulars, universals and states of affairs. While we saw that deflationism blocks one particular route to that argument, it does not block the debate about states of affairs and universals.

Note also that many first-order issues seem perfectly metaphysical anyway. For instance, consider a claim like: $\langle \text{not-P} \rangle$ in virtue of Q . Saying that this becomes a merely ‘first-order’ issue about why not-P is true doesn’t make it not metaphysical; for many it invites issues about negative truths and facts. The same applies to many other kinds of truths whose subject matter is not that usually studied by the natural sciences, for instance truths about logical, parthood, time, causation, free will, induction, and so on. If the *subject matter* is metaphysical, the fact that truthmaking questions

are first-order makes no difference to whether they are metaphysical. This doesn't mean they really are metaphysical questions – we might argue that they aren't for other reasons. The point is that deflationism doesn't affect this issue: whether or not truthmaking questions are metaphysical is independent of deflationism.

Perhaps the situation is different in the case of ethics and other disciplines. For in ethics, the subject matter is ethical and not obviously *metaphysical*. We don't think of people working on first-order ethical questions as metaphysicians, in the same way we would think this of someone asking questions about parthood and location. So we might think that deflationism turns an apparently metaphysical question into a first-order ethical question, and ethical questions are not themselves metaphysical. Deflationism stops us thinking that we can ask ethical questions, and then distinctively *metaphysical* questions about ethics: such questions are just more ethics. So deflationism does seem to make a difference here, by stopping the non-metaphysical become metaphysical.

I think the best response here is to give up the term 'metaphysics' to whomever wants it most, and argue that nevertheless, we can still ask truthmaking questions about ethics and they still need to be answered. We still need to say what makes ethical propositions true, i.e. why things in the world have the ethical properties they have. These questions may be very general, but they're still ethical. And deflationism doesn't make them optional questions, even if in some sense it makes them non-metaphysical.

Another argument here is that by making these questions first-order, deflationism leaves us no way of understanding the crucial familiar questions about the naturalness of ethical facts, and so on. If we see properties and facts as exhausted by Horwich's schemas, it's not clear how to make sense of the view that ethical properties and facts are natural or non-natural. We might think that there are no first-order ethical methods for deciding these questions, and so they are illegitimate if deflationism is true.

However, even those who don't believe in properties and facts as explanatory entities can still make sense of distinctions between properties. For instance, a nominalist may distinguish between a causally active property F-ness, and an inactive one G-ness. But she doesn't think F-ness and G-ness are things which can bear causal relations. Instead she understands the difference by saying that there are true claims of the form 'P because x is F' (where 'because' takes a causal reading), but no true claims of the form 'P

because x is G '. The causal efficacy of properties can be understood in terms of true and false causal claims involving predicates.

This sort of strategy can be applied to ethical properties; we simply need a conception of what it is to be a natural or a non-natural *truth*, and this will tell us what it is to be a natural or non-natural property. We can argue what it is for a truth to be natural, what it is for the claim 'it is natural that p ' to be true. But we can do this without mentioning truths, facts and properties. This is independent of deflationary issues about those things.

This lets us interpret questions about naturalism and non-naturalism. Whether ethical truths have natural or non-natural truthmakers is settled by whether the ' p ' in

x is good in virtue of p

is a natural or a non-natural truth.

This kind of approach is familiar in the literature on expressivism's treatment of the mind-independence of ethical facts. Blackburn (1998, p.296; pp.311-2) treats statements about mind-independence as first-order ethical statements of the form:

x is good and it would be good even if nobody believed it.

This gives us a notion of mind-independence which is independent of deflationary issues about truth, facts and properties. There's no reason we can't extend this to issues about naturalness too. So deflationism does not undermine typical metaphysical questions about properties, by making truthmaking claims first-order.

5.7 Conclusion

So to sum up, deflationism doesn't make truthmaking questions unintelligible, unanswerable, avoidable, or trivial. For deflationists, truthmaking claims are simply non-causal explanations of one (bearerless) truth in terms of another, one way the world is in terms of another. These only derivatively give us explanations of the truth of truthbearers, and as such truthmaking is independent of considerations about truthbearers, *pace* many mainstream truthmaker theorists. Truthmaking claims, therefore, are intelligible. And they're answerable too – explanations can be given. Moreover, they're not avoidable: deflationism doesn't let us off making these explanations.

Deflationism doesn't stop truthmaker claims being genuinely about language, and hence well motivated by facts about language use. Nor does it

make answers to questions about truthmakers trivial. Nor does it undermine them by making them first-order: it does make them first-order, but this doesn't undermine their intelligibility or need for answers. Deflationism still lets us formulate our ordinary debates about truthmakers, including questions about the status of properties relevant to those debates.

As such, non-representationalists' commitment to deflationism about truth, facts and properties doesn't affect what they should say about truthmaking. For instance, metaethical expressivists' deflationary views don't make questions about truthmakers for ethical truths unintelligible, trivial or otherwise avoidable. Such questions are merely requests for explanations of ethical truths, and as such are neither unintelligible nor avoidable for the expressivist.

In the next chapter I will explore this implication further while asking whether any specific element of either global or local non-representationalism affects truthmaking debates. Do any of these elements affect how non-representationalists should treat traditional metaphysical investigations into the truthmakers for certain kinds of truths, and related investigations about the nature of the entities and properties involved? As in this chapter, I will argue that these elements have little impact.

CHAPTER 6

PLACEMENT PROBLEMS

6.1 Introduction

In the previous chapter I argued that non-representationalists' commitment to deflationism about truth, facts, and properties doesn't affect how they should approach metaphysical questions about truthmaking. However, this is just one of the ways non-representationalism is thought to undermine metaphysics. In this chapter I will focus on the most distinctive element of non-representationalism: its suspicion of representational features.

I will begin by sketching out the notion of a *placement problem*, a convenient way of thinking about the metaphysical issues non-representationalism is thought to avoid. Then I will articulate what I'll call the *basic anti-metaphysical idea*, a simple way of stating the idea that non-representationalism avoids metaphysics. The idea is that by avoiding representational features, non-representationalists can avoid questions about the things in the world that representational features relate us to.

After dismissing several unsuccessful readings of the basic anti-metaphysical idea, I will argue that we should interpret it in terms of *explanatory scepticism*, the view that representational features play no role in explaining the meaning and use of a given area of language and thought. This yields what I will call the *anti-metaphysical thesis* or AMT, which roughly says that for any discourse D, a non-representationalist explanation of D provides a non-metaphysical resolution of the placement problem for D. This claim is the core of non-representationalism's anti-metaphysical impact.

AMT's precise content depends on what we count as a non-representationalist explanation, and its overall impact on metaphysics depends on how widely we think non-representationalism applies. As we saw in Chapter 4, localists think that a non-representationalist explanation avoids the subject

matter of the discourse, and therefore that only some discourses can be explained in this way. Globalists, on the other hand, think such an explanation avoids *general* word-world relations, and therefore that all discourses can be so explained. As such, we can identify global and local versions of AMT.

I will argue against AMT on two grounds. First, the globalist's reading of it is subject to a class of counterexamples, cases where a non-representationalist explanation of a discourse doesn't provide a non-metaphysical resolution of its placement problem. As such, even if global non-representationalism is true, it does not resolve *all* placement problems in a non-metaphysical way. Second, AMT is false on both localist and globalist readings, not just because it has counterexamples but because there are good reasons to believe its contrary: *no* placement problem can be given a non-metaphysical resolution by a non-representationalist explanation. After arguing for these two points, I will draw out some consequences of the discussion, which I will elaborate on in the concluding chapter.

6.2 Placement problems and the anti-metaphysical thesis

To begin let's look at what Huw Price calls the 'matching model' of metaphysics (2013, Ch. 2). The model has two sides. On the 'left', we have statements, and on the 'right' the world. The idea is that for each statement on the left, we have to find a truthmaker on the right. (Recall from the previous chapter that truthmakers can just be bearerless truths, they needn't be objects.) This can be difficult, especially if we accept a *naturalist* restriction on the available truthmakers, taking them to be exhausted by the truths studied by the natural sciences. Where we have trouble matching a statement to a natural truthmaker – where 'it is hard to see what natural facts we could be talking about' Price says, this is a *placement problem* (2013, p.5).

There are two further relevant points about placement problems. The first is to note that they can concern not just truthmakers but properties and objects, things corresponding not to sentences but parts of them. For instance, we might ask what property 'beautiful' picks out, or what object 'the empty set' refers to. In what follows, I'll speak only of truthmakers, but what I say covers properties and objects too. Recall also that in the previous chapter I pointed out how deflationists about properties will want to understand truths which mention properties, like the truth that *b* has the property *F*-ness, in terms of ones which don't, like the truth that *b* is *F*. So

terms picking out properties will be treated in the same way as statements, in terms of truthmakers.

The second point is that placement problems needn't be driven by naturalism. It may simply be difficult to find truthmakers for certain statements. Take modal statements. We may object to all the common positions about truthmakers for these, not on naturalist grounds but simply because nothing we find plausible could do the job. For instance, we may think there aren't enough truths about the actual world to make modal truths true, but that David Lewis's real *possibilia* are too numerous to want to accept. Neither of these worries need be driven by naturalism, but we still have a placement problem.

A placement problem, then, occurs when we find it difficult to find a truthmaker to match with a statement. We can now introduce what I'll call the *basic anti-metaphysical idea* concerning non-representationalism, which goes like this. Representationalists treat language as representational, and this involves talking about relations between words on the one hand and the world on the other. Talking about word-world relations, however, raises questions about the worldly relata of these relations: what entities, properties, facts do our words represent? This leads us to placement problems. The basic anti-metaphysical idea is this: by avoiding representational relations, non-representationalism doesn't raise these questions. No mention of the relations means no questions about the relata, and therefore no placement problem arises. From now on I will talk about either *avoiding* a placement problem or *solving* it: when I talk about solving the placement problem, I mean doing so without talking about truthmakers. Either way, truthmaker questions do not arise for the non-representationalist, if the basic anti-metaphysical idea is right. In this chapter, I will make precise sense of this basic idea, and then show that it's false.

The first thing to do is to reject several bad ways of making sense of the basic idea. The first of these relies on understanding non-representationalism in terms of *rejection*, as I put it in Chapter 2. If non-representationalists simply deny that the language in question can be true, that it represents or refers, and so on, then placement problems don't arise. If the sentences don't state truths, there can be no question of what makes them true. However, we've seen that non-representationalists don't reject representational features. Instead their view is *explanatory scepticism*, that these features play no role in the best explanation of the meaning and use of the language.

So the basic anti-metaphysical idea can't be explained in terms of rejection: non-representationalists don't avoid placement problems this way.

The second bad interpretation is to take non-representationalism as involving the view that the language in question states truths that are mind-dependent. This too would resolve placement problems easily. If there's nothing more to, say, a painting's being beautiful than us finding it so, then there is no placement problem about beauty. If there's nothing more to necessary truth than our decision to use language in a certain way, there is no placement problem about necessity. And so on.¹ However non-representationalists don't accept that their view entails mind-dependence. As I said in Chapter 1 I'm assuming they're right about this. So this route around placement problems isn't always available either, since there will be cases where non-representationalists think they can avoid placement problems yet don't accept mind-dependence.

Finally, we shouldn't read non-representationalism as resolving placement problems by analysing language in the way that many philosophers since the linguistic turn have done. For instance consider the word 'nothing', as in the sentence 'I started off with nothing and I've still got most of it left'.² Nobody would want to read 'nothing' here as a referring term - instead it's a quantifier, and realising this lets us avoid questions about what this *nothing* is.³ This manoeuvre is familiar: realising the true logical form of a proposition lets us avoid unnecessary metaphysical questions. The most famous example, perhaps, is Russell's (1905) theory of definite descriptions, and the metaphysical consequences he claims for it. But this isn't how non-representationalists think they avoid placement problems. For instance, an expressivist doesn't think that 'torture is wrong' expresses a proposition of a different form. Her point is quite different: to express an ethical proposition is to express an attitude.

Instead, the only way that non-representationalism will make a difference here is through its explanatory scepticism: this is its distinctive view about representational features. The central idea is as follows. Explanatory scepticism means that we can *explain* the given area of language – call it a *discourse* for convenience – without treating it as representational. This means we can explain the discourse without raising questions about the relata of

¹ This doesn't work in all cases, most notably the mental, since saying that what's true about the mental depends on minds doesn't help at all.

² I owe this lovely example to Seastick Steve's 2008 album.

³ This is not to say that anyone actually ever thought otherwise. See Oliver (1996).

representational relations. Non-representationalism avoids these questions, and hence metaphysical placement problems, by giving its distinctive ‘what it does and why it’s there’ (hereafter: WDT) theory of the discourse.

The clearest example of this argument is in metaethical expressivism. Here’s Simon Blackburn stating the argument:

[The WDT theory] is the perspicuous representation that enables the pragmatist to put *sufficient* weight on the functions associated with the discourse to avoid putting *any* weight on the metaphysical imaginings that it might threaten to engender. ... So, for instance, a perspicuous representation of how we have a descriptive-sounding evaluative language [i.e. a WDT theory for ethical language] may itself eschew any truck with description, reference, facts or truth-makers, but use as its only building blocks humdrum situations of choosing, preferring, recommending or needing. Its promise is that with attention to these activities we come to see how our evaluative descriptions of things need no truck with the idea that we somehow respond to an autonomous realm of values: a metaphysical extra that we inexplicably care about on top of voicing and discussing our more humdrum concerns. (Blackburn, 2010b, pp.4-5)

Blackburn is saying that a WDT theory for ethical language which doesn’t use ‘description, reference, facts or truth-makers’ avoids metaphysical questions about a ‘realm of values’. Elsewhere Blackburn says that on his non-representationalist approach, ‘metaphysics bows out of the picture’ (2015, p.850).

Other non-representationalists agree with Blackburn about this. Michael Williams uses expressivism as an example of the basic anti-metaphysical idea:

Representationalist explanations of meaning tend to inherit the apparent ontological commitments of the vocabulary under review. A representationalist approach to moral predicates will tend to commit us *ab initio* to moral properties, and thus (if we have naturalistic inclinations) to metaphysical worries about their character. By contrast, the only antecedent ontological commitments of use-theoretic [i.e. non-representationalist] approaches to meaning are to speakers, their utterances, and so on:

that is, to things that everyone is bound to recognize anyway. Expressivism's ontological conservatism gives it obvious attractions for philosophers with a naturalistic turn of mind. Values ... are not metaphysically problematic entities (or properties), waiting to be detected by some special faculty, distinct from our normal five senses. (Williams, 2013, p.130)

Price does too:

By focusing on moral *talk*, rather than moral *properties*, the expressivist simply sidesteps the metaphysical conundrums that trouble her representationalist opponents, realists and anti-realists alike. (Price, 2013, p.157)

Here Price is explicit that expressivism's anti-metaphysical impact is partly due to its turning to 'moral *talk*' – i.e. focusing on giving an explanation of what ethical language does and why it's there. It's also crucial that the expressivist theory is not representationalist unlike its 'opponents'.

The anti-metaphysical view defended in the quotations above isn't specific to ethics and so applies elsewhere. The basic idea is that a non-representationalist WDT theory can explain the discourse in question without treating it as representational and thereby without raising metaphysical questions about the worldly relata of representational relations. Since non-representational theories in general avoid treating the relevant discourse as representational, this argument in principle holds in other cases too.

Indeed, Price seems to argue that the anti-metaphysical claim applies globally.

Term by term, sentence by sentence, topic by topic, the representationalist's semantic ladder leads us from language to the world, from words to their worldly objects. Somehow, the resulting multiplicity of kinds of entities – values, modalities, meanings, and the rest – needs to be accommodated within the natural realm. To what else, after all, could natural speakers be related by natural semantic relations?

Without a representationalist conception of the talk, however, the puzzle takes a very different form. It remains in the linguistic realm, a puzzle about a plurality of ways of talking, of forms of human linguistic behaviour. The challenge is now

simply to explain in naturalistic terms how creatures like us come to talk in these various ways. ... Without representationalism, the joints between topics remain joints between kinds of behaviour, and don't need to be mirrored in ontology of any other kind. (Price, 2013, p.20)

Price is not discussing a specific case here: he's discussing language in general. This is perhaps the best statement of Price's linguistic non-representationalist attack on metaphysical inquiry.

We can therefore state what I'll call the *anti-metaphysical thesis* or AMT:

Anti-metaphysical thesis (AMT) For any discourse D, a WDT theory of D which does not treat D as representational provides a non-metaphysical resolution of the placement problem for D.

Recall that *treating as representational* is just a nice shorthand for *ascribing representational features*. AMT is a universal generalisation. However note that only global non-representationalists will think that it implies a general route around metaphysics, since only they believe that non-representationalism is true everywhere. Localists will accept the thesis but think that it is not always relevant since non-representationalism is not true of all discourses. Interestingly, however, both global and local non-representationalists seem to accept AMT, despite their different conceptions of what representational features are.

Since AMT is a generalisation, it is false if it has counterexamples. In the next section I will show that when we read AMT as a global non-representationalist does, there is a class of counterexamples to it. This means that even if global non-representationalism is true, it does not have the global anti-metaphysical impact claimed for it. In the section after that I will argue that read as either localists or globalists read it, we have good reason to think its *contrary* is true: that *no* WDT theory avoids metaphysics. This is a more alarming result for non-representationalists, since it affects localists and globalists, whereas my first argument against AMT only affects globalists.

6.3 Non-metaphysical resolution?

In this section I will argue that there is a class of counterexamples to AMT when we read it in terms of global non-representationalists' understand-

ing of what it is to treat a discourse as representational. Recall how in Chapter 4 I argued that globalists' explanatory scepticism is not about relations between language (and thought) and its subject matter, but about *general* word-world relations, which are roughly those which explain whole kinds of terms. As such, globalists will read AMT like so:

Globalist Anti-Metaphysical Thesis (GAMT) For any discourse D, a WDT theory of D which does not ascribe general word-world relations to D provides a non-metaphysical resolution of the placement problem for D.

I will now argue that GAMT is false, before answering two objections to my argument.

The reason GAMT is false is that:

- (i) Globalists allow relations to subject matter in their WDT explanations.
- (ii) Some discourses (I'll call them *no-exit cases*) require such relations in their WDT theories.
- (iii) In such cases, the WDT theory of the discourse does not resolve its placement problem in a non-metaphysical way.

I will now explain each of these in turn.

My first claim is true simply because globalism only excludes general word-world relations from its WDT theories. It does not therefore exclude all relations between words and their subject matter, since not all such relations are general. We already saw this in action in Chapter 4, where Price and Williams both allowed that a term like 'red' should be explained in terms of relations with its subject matter. Price thinks terms like these are 'e-representational'. Price doesn't take e-representational terms to undermine globalism, since he doesn't count e-representation as a representational feature.

The second claim is true because there are areas of thought and language which we can only explain in terms of relations with their subject matter. Let's call these *no-exit cases*: this is because Blackburn uses them to undermine globalism in what he calls the *no exit* problem. There are many words which seem like no-exit cases: we might think that the word 'red' gets its meaning in virtue of some relationship with red things. We may have similar views for words we use to describe our environment and the things in it:

‘cat’, ‘tree’, ‘pig’, ‘apple’, and so on. Blackburn argues that the language of ‘middle-sized dry goods’ and ‘the coastal waters of science’ are no-exit cases:

If we insisted instead on posing the [WDT] question, how come that we go in for descriptions of the world in terms of surrounding middle-sized dry goods?, then the answer is only going to be the flat-footed stutter or self-pat on the back: it is because we are indeed surrounded by middle-sized dry goods. ... A similar fate awaits us, in many people’s view, if we pose [the same] question about at least the coastal waters of science. How come we go in for descriptions of the world in terms of energies and currents? Because we have learned to become sensitive to, measure, predict and control, and to describe and refer to, energies and currents. (Blackburn, 2013, pp.78-9)

So point (ii) is plausible: there are no-exit cases.

Blackburn thinks that no-exit cases undermine globalism. In Chapter 4 I argued that this is false, since globalists do not count subject matter relations as representational features. More importantly, however, no-exit cases do show us that global non-representationalism cannot have the same metaphysical impact had by local non-representationalist views like ethical expressivism. The key point was that expressivism could give us a WDT theory for ethical language and thought without invoking ethical subject matter at all. The idea was that if you had worries about the metaphysics of ethical truths, facts and properties, you could avoid them. Instead of trying to give theories of those things, step *sideways* and join the expressivist with her WDT theory of ethical language which simply doesn’t mention ethical subject matter at all. She can tell you how ethical language and thought works, and why we have it, without mentioning ethical truths, facts, and properties at all. The crucial element here is the sidestep: don’t try to say what makes ethical statements true, instead say what it is to use an ethical statement, and why we have such things.

This simply isn’t possible in no-exit cases. Suppose for some reason you worry about the metaphysics of trees. You step sideways, and aim not to tell us what trees are but what ‘tree’ does and why we have it. But in outlining your account, you end up invoking trees, for instance in a causal relation with our word ‘tree’. Whatever metaphysical issues trees raised will still be raised by your WDT theory of ‘tree’. So even if your WDT theory of

‘tree’ is correct, and even illuminating in a surprising way, it will not avoid whatever metaphysical issues trees raised. Whatever issues we have ‘placing’ trees in the world, the WDT theory will not solve them.

So while no-exit cases don’t falsify global non-representationalism, they do show that it cannot non-metaphysically solve *all* our placement problems. No-exit cases don’t admit of the kind of WDT theory which dodges metaphysics: the distinctive non-representationalist WDT manoeuvre has no metaphysical impact here. So claim (iii) is true too. As such, when read according to global non-representationalism, AMT is false. WDT theories cannot give non-metaphysical resolutions of placement problems in no-exit cases: the metaphysical problems remain.

6.3.1 Objections

Price argues against claim (iii). He argues that no-exit cases do not *raise* placement problems in the first place. The fact that the best WDT theory for ‘tree’ invokes trees is not a problem, because there are no metaphysical placement problems regarding trees:

But why, precisely, should a global pragmatism need an exit, of the kind Blackburn and Kraut have in mind? The view that it does so seems at least in part to be a legacy of the cases with which the expressivist began, such as that of ethics. There, it was important that the distinctive ontology of the ethical viewpoint – values, moral properties, and the like – not be in view, from the [pragmatist’s] external standpoint. ... At least to the extent that the ethical conundrums arise from a commitment to naturalism, the case of science is different. There isn’t a placement problem for scientific language, at least at first pass. So there isn’t any pressure to escape to a theoretical standpoint from which one doesn’t need to mention such things. (Price, 2013, pp.157-8)

Here Price is responding to Blackburn’s argument that scientific terminology, which in this context includes words describing ‘middle-sized dry goods’ like trees, cannot be satisfactorily treated using the non-representationalist WDT approach.

Price’s point here is that scientific terminology cannot raise placement problems, since the entities and properties posited by science are *inherently*

naturalistic, being posited by scientific investigation itself. As such, questions about that subject matter are just first-order scientific questions, not metaphysical ones. There are no *placement problems* in such cases, just ordinary scientific questions.

Price's claim is that there are no terms which (a) are no-exit cases and (b) raise placement problems. But the only example Price gives is of 'scientific language'. This is insufficient: there may be other no-exit cases which are metaphysically problematic, and moreover Price himself later admits that scientific language may be one, due to the possibility that it essentially involves modal notions like possibility and causation (2013, p.160). If this is right, then even scientific language, which is by its very nature meant to be naturalistically acceptable, may raise material placement problems about causal relations and possibilities.

Aside from causation and modality, many may think that plenty of what scientific theories posit is metaphysically problematic and would require a metaphysical response to place it in the world. For instance, it is still unclear how we should interpret quantum mechanics, and resolve various issues which arise there, for instance to do with indeterminacy and observation-dependence. So quantum mechanics *by itself* raises placement problems, metaphysical questions: what makes physicists' theories of quantum phenomena true? Is there indeterminacy at the quantum level? Do quantum phenomena depend on observation? These are clearly metaphysical questions about quantum physics, and they have not yet been answered.

Finally, the fact that there's no naturalistic 'pressure', as Price puts it, to avoid invoking something in our theory doesn't mean that it doesn't raise metaphysical questions. Consider 'tree' again. There are few who might find trees particularly metaphysically worrying. But we might well still ask what trees are, and that question remains even after we give the WDT theory for 'tree'. The fact that our theory isn't in metaphysical trouble if we don't say what trees are doesn't mean that there isn't anything metaphysical to say about them.

Outside the scientific language Blackburn and Price discuss, there are plenty of terms which seem likely to be no-exit cases. For a start, causation seems likely to be a no-exit case. Any naturalistic theory of how humans come to speak and think in causal terms will face extreme pressure to invoke causation. Even a story which starts with us perceiving loose and separate events must involve an account of perception, and causal relations between

perceivers and the world will likely play an essential role in that account. So it seems likely that causation is a no-exit case, and therefore leaves the placement problem for causation unsolved.

Modality is another likely no-exit case. If once again our best WDT theory of modal language invokes perception, it will have to invoke causation. But in making sense of causation, one may end up using counterfactuals and other modal claims. If so, modality will be a no-exit case. In fact, explanation more widely will probably be a no-exit case too. Non-representationalists want to give explanations of the language they're interested in, and in doing so they invoke notions like constitutive explanation, or causal explanation. These are rudimentary elements of their WDT theories, and will therefore count as no-exit cases.

Note, though, how central the three above cases are to contemporary metaphysics: causation, modality, and explanation. Non-representationalism cannot get us off the hook in placing these things in the world. The characteristic shift to a WDT theory will not help. There is still as much need for an answer to the placement problem as there was before the non-representationalist gave her theory.

There are many more cases of terms which simply haven't attracted much or any non-representationalist attention. For instance, classic metaphysical issues concerning identity, persistence and mereology haven't been addressed. Whether these are no-exit cases of course remains to be seen. However, the important point here is that non-representationalism as such, even *global* non-representationalism, does not determine whether questions surrounding these cases can be settled simply by WDT theories or whether they need the usual, metaphysical treatment which Price wants to avoid. Non-representationalism doesn't assure us in advance that all placement problems can be solved in the way metaethical expressivists purport to solve the placement problem for ethics. And this is precisely because it cannot always avoid invoking relations between words and their subject matter.

However, the pragmatist philosopher Amie Thomasson makes a separate argument that no-exit cases do not necessarily give us metaphysical conclusions (Thomasson, Forthcoming). She focuses on Blackburn's discussion of words like 'table' which are about ordinary objects or 'middle-sized dry goods'. She argues that the fact that words for ordinary objects are no-exit cases doesn't give us reason to think that tables are part of the *real ontology* of the world. This doesn't give us reason to think that our terms for ordinary

objects describe what's 'really' in the world. For instance, it doesn't support the idea that 'there is a table' describes the world more accurately than a mereological nihilist language which instead says 'there are particles arranged tablewise' or an ontological nihilist's feature-placing language which says 'it's tabling'.

Instead, Thomasson argues, it indicates that ordinary object terms and perhaps the concepts they express are *semantically basic* for humans – they 'cannot be learned or introduced just by way of learning definitions stated in other terms' (Forthcoming, pp.9-10). She argues that this is backed by psychological evidence, and that it explains why ordinary object terms are a no-exit case. But she denies that this means we're committed to thinking of ordinary objects as what *really* exist, as opposed to mereological simples, or just 'stuff' as the ontological nihilist would have it.⁴

Thomasson's point about ordinary object terms may be correct, but it doesn't threaten my argument. For Thomasson is not really committed to the idea that ordinary object terms do form a no-exit case. She admits that different ontologies, like those of the mereological nihilist and the ontological nihilist, *can* give us theories which are empirically equivalent to an ordinary object ontology, i.e. which require no change in our empirical commitments or predictions. If this is the case, and all these theories can give equally good explanations of ordinary object terms, then this simply shows that ordinary object language is not a no-exit case. We *don't* need to use ordinary object language to explain it: we can explain it on the basis of other entities, like particles.

This undermines Thomasson's claim that ordinary object terms are no-exit cases because they're semantically basic. This is false – the right thing to say is that they only *seem* like no-exit cases because they're semantically basic. It's hard to see how to explain our language without such terms, but if the ontological and mereological nihilists' theories really are empirically equivalent to ordinary object theories, this must be possible. So Thomasson doesn't have a case here of terms which (i) are a no-exit case and (ii) do not raise metaphysical questions.

I'm not claiming that the fact that some terms form a no-exit case means that they really do describe the true ontology of the world. My claim is more modest: in no-exit cases, applying the usual WDT theory approach

⁴ This isn't to say that Thomasson thinks that anything *really* exists, since she's sceptical that any sense can be made of the term 'really' in these debates.

does not get us anywhere with regard to the corresponding placement problem. It may be that there is no ontologically privileged way of describing the world, but this isn't settled by the non-representationalists' WDT theories.

So to conclude this section: when we read the anti-metaphysical thesis AMT according to global non-representationalism, it turns out to be *false*. As such, even if the distinctive 'what it does and why it's there' approach does let us resolve *some* placement problems non-metaphysically – namely those where we don't need relations to subject matter – this result does not apply globally. So global non-representationalism does not give us a general route around metaphysical questions. By exploring what globalism actually involves, we've seen that the basic anti-metaphysical idea – no relations, no relata – fails in some cases. This is simply because globalism only rules out *general* relations, and there are plenty of non-general ones which therefore raise metaphysical questions about their relata.

6.4 AMT for local non-representationalists

AMT is false when we interpret it using globalists' conception of representational features. But what about if we interpret it according to localism? Then it might deliver an anti-metaphysical result: in those cases where we *don't* need to explain a term using relations with its subject matter, our WDT theory will give a non-metaphysical resolution of the placement problem. I will now show that this, too, is false. Indeed I will argue that it is false not because of a handful of counterexamples. It is false because we have good reason to think that *no* WDT theory, even one free of relations with subject matter, can resolve a placement problem without doing metaphysics.

Just as globalists read AMT as GAMT, localists will read AMT in terms of relations with subject matter:

Localist anti-metaphysical thesis (LAMT) For any discourse D, a WDT theory of D which does not ascribe relations between D and its subject matter provides a non-metaphysical resolution of the placement problem for D.

This automatically avoids my no-exit argument against the globalist's version GAMT. But it's still false, as I will now argue.

Note that a key idea behind the anti-metaphysical thesis is that the WDT theory offered by the non-representationalist is going to be *enough* to resolve

the placement problem. So long as we can avoid the subject matter of the discourse, our explanation is enough to resolve whatever worries we had about the truthmakers for the truths of the discourse, or the entities or properties associated with it, and so on. The distinctive WDT sidestep – ask not what makes it true but what it does and why we have it – is meant to resolve the problems we had with finding suitable truthmakers. This is why non-representationalists emphasise their focus on WDT theories: they take it to be distinctive of their approach and crucial to the anti-metaphysical impact they think it has.

This idea is supported by the view that placement problems initially arise because of facts about human thought and language. On this view, we begin with data like the fact that humans have thoughts about what is right and wrong, and talk about such things. The problem arises when we ask what could make these sentences true. Let's call this view of placement problems the *linguistic view*. (This name ignores the fact that it is not just language but also *thought* which motivates these problems, but it is convenient.)

Price is explicit about this point. He distinguishes the linguistic view of placement problems from a *material* view:

On one possible view, the starting point is the object itself. We are simply acquainted with X, and hence ... come to wonder how this thing-with-which-we-are-acquainted could be the kind of thing studied by science. On the other possible view, the starting point lies in human linguistic practices, broadly construed. Roughly, we note that humans (ourselves or others) employ the term 'X' in language, or the concept X, in thought ... we come to wonder how what these speakers are thereby talking or thinking about could be the kind of thing studied by science. (Price, 2013, p.7)

He argues in favour of the latter, the linguistic view. As a result, he argues that 'The challenge is now *simply to explain* in naturalistic terms how creatures like us come to talk in these ways', and that once this is done no puzzle remains (2013, pp.19-20, emphasis added).

Blackburn also defends a linguistic view. He sets up the placement problem for ethics as follows:

So the problem is one of finding room for ethics, or of placing ethics within the disenchanted, non-ethical order which we inhabit, and of which we are a part. ... 'Finding room' means understanding how we think ethically, and why it offends against nothing in the rest of our world-view for us to do so (Blackburn, 1998, p.49)

Here Blackburn is saying that 'placing ethics' is first and foremost about understanding how our ethical thought works. In §6.5 I'll discuss more what it means to show that ethics doesn't 'offend' against our world-view.

More recently, Blackburn contrasts his own pragmatist philosophical approach with approaches which ask questions about the subject matter itself – those which take the material view, to use Price's term:

... the truth-theoretic approach identifies its problems in terms of questions of the form 'what is the 'truth-maker' or the fact involved in something or other?' A direct answer would be modeled on a paradigm of successful intellectual inquiry such as analytical chemistry. You take the substance you are investigating, and take it apart to see how it is made up. 'Analytical metaphysics' looks at the elusive beasts in the philosophical jungle, such as values, norms, natural laws, alternative possibilities, numbers, and others in the same spirit. Break them apart and see what they are made up of. This is the paradigm that has dominated recent philosophy to the point at which other approaches are invisible to many writers (Blackburn, 2015, p.850)

Blackburn contrasts this approach with his own:

However, there is an alternative tradition, which asks a different question. It says that it is no good looking to see what laws or possibilities or values or numbers are 'made up of'. They are not substances you can put under a microscope or on a petri dish or in a retort. They are categories with which we think. The key to understanding them, therefore, is to see what such thinking does for us. What is its function and purpose? You might answer that by giving a 'just-so' story or evolutionarily plausible sketch of how such thinking might have arisen, and you could do that without ever getting a picture of what the apparent subject matter of such thought 'is'. Metaphysics bows out of the

picture; uses and purposes take their place. (Blackburn, 2015, p.850)

Here we can see the idea that by studying the ‘function and purpose’ of the language without thinking about its ‘subject matter’, we avoid metaphysics. Implicit here is the view that the theory of function and purpose – the WDT theory – is *enough* to solve any puzzle we faced about the subject matter itself.

A common point here is that we shouldn’t assume that the language and thought we’re faced with is representational, so to explain it *just is* to give an account of its subject matter. This assumption ignores the various different non-representational things the language might be doing. It ignores the *functional pluralism* that non-representationalists accept: the idea that different kinds of language can do different things, i.e. that their meaning and use can be explained by different features.⁵

We can see how the linguistic view supports AMT. If placement problems are ultimately about explaining human language and thought, then giving such an explanation without citing the subject matter of that language and thought will resolve the placement problem without doing metaphysics.

However, this is false. The reason it’s false is that even if placement problems are *motivated* by facts about language and thought, they are not just about explaining those facts in the WDT style non-representationalists favour. This is because placement problems are not just about the language and thought itself but what makes it true. And saying what makes a sentence or belief true is *not* saying what it does and why it’s there. It is giving an explanation of the (bearerless) truth stated by that sentence, as we saw in the previous chapter. Saying what makes a sentence or belief true is simply explaining a way the world is, and this has nothing to do with whether that sentence or belief is representational.

So if a sentence or belief is true, there is already a question about what makes this so, and if it is difficult to answer then we have a placement problem. Moreover, whether a sentence or belief is true is independent of non-representationalism, since it doesn’t deny that the sentences and beliefs in the given domain can be true. So non-representationalism doesn’t affect whether the truthmaker question is appropriate.

⁵ This point shows non-representationalists’ Wittgensteinian influences: they often cite Wittgenstein’s work in the *Philosophical Investigations* where he argues against the idea that language all does the same thing. See Blackburn (1990b) and Price (2004) for more on this.

The WDT theory has no impact on this: it does not give us answers to the truthmaker questions, and nor does it provide an alternative. For even if those questions were motivated by language and thought, they were never questions about how that language and thought works and how it came about.⁶

The placement problem for a given discourse may well be about what it does and why it's there, in *part*. However, it is also about truthmakers: we find placement problems when it's hard to explain a range of truths. As I mentioned before, sometimes these problems arise because we want to find natural truthmakers, but this needn't always be so. Placement problems therefore remain even after we give the WDT theory. Even after expressivists tell us what ethical language does and why it's there, we can still ask: what makes ethical truths true? What explains them?

Does this ignore the plurality of functions different areas of our language can have? Doesn't it ignore the fact that our ethical language, for instance, is not describing worldly states of affairs but instead is expressing attitudes? No. The plurality of functions that our language has only appears in the WDT theory: we only mention the differences in what words like 'good', 'chance', 'cause', 'beautiful', 'belief', and so on *do* when we're explaining what they do and why we use them. But this is entirely independent of whether those words can be used to express truths. This is precisely because we're interpreting non-representationalism in terms of explanatory scepticism rather than rejection – as saying that representational features play no explanatory role, rather than that the language in question doesn't have them at all. If we take this anti-rejection stance seriously, we find that truthmaker questions about the discourse in question are left untouched. They are left unanswered by our WDT theory, but more importantly our WDT theory doesn't show us that they *needn't* be answered. So long as we think that truths typically need explanation, and we find it difficult to explain the relevant truths, the placement problem lingers.

To take an example, consider ethical truths. It is difficult to find truthmakers for them. Often we explain individual ethical truths like

The specific instance of torture *T* is wrong

in terms of more general ones

⁶ As we saw in the previous chapter, Price argues that deflationism entails that questions about truthmakers are not well motivated by language. While if true it would affect my argument here, as I argued there, it is false.

Torture is wrong

We also explain these in terms of yet more general ones, for example that causing pain is wrong, that not maximising utility is wrong, and so on. Somewhere our explanation ends, perhaps with a claim like

All other things being equal, pain is bad

What explains this truth? No natural truth comes to mind. There's no further natural fact about pain in virtue of which it is bad. If this is so, then we have two options. Either we find some other non-natural truth to explain it, or else we treat it as brute. The former route will raise questions about how we explain that further truth. The latter involves accepting brute ethical truths. None of the above reasoning is affected by expressivism or its WDT theory. We'll return to the placement problem for ethics later.

So even if placement problems are initially motivated by facts about language and thought, they remain even after non-representationalists give their WDT theories. This is because (i) truthmaker questions can be motivated by facts about language and thought, but (ii) they are not questions about how it works and why we have it, and (iii) non-representationalism does not answer them, nor does it have any impact on whether they are legitimate questions. Point (iii) holds because of non-representationalism's shift away from rejection views like Ayer's, to explanatory scepticism.

At this point the non-representationalist might argue that even if the WDT theory doesn't answer truthmaker questions, their answers are either trivial or else first-order questions which don't require a metaphysical treatment. I discussed both these objections in the previous chapter in relation to deflationism. Briefly, neither of these points saves us from a metaphysical response to the placement problem. For truthmaker questions are not always trivial. Deflationism about truth tells us that \langle honesty is good \rangle is true because honesty is good, but it does not tell us what it is in virtue of which honesty is good, and nor does it tell us that there are only trivial answers here. The fact that truthmaker questions are indeed first-order questions about what explains certain truths has no impact whatsoever on whether they are metaphysical in any interesting sense. Pointing out that Cartesian dualism is a first-order claim about the mind makes it no less metaphysical; pointing out that ethical naturalism is a first-order claim about the ethical has equally little impact.

So far, we've seen how the linguistic view doesn't support the localist's version of the anti-metaphysical thesis. However there are also good reasons to doubt the linguistic view in the first place, at least in some cases. It is more plausible that some of our metaphysical puzzles are not in fact reactions to human language and thought but instead the phenomena themselves. We notice that we have sensations and consciousness and ask what these things could be, and how they fit into the world. We come to believe that the world has a creator, or a purpose, and ask what could make this so. These issues don't begin by us noting how humans talk about sensations, consciousness, gods. They begin with our (putative) experiences of such things. If this is right, then the corresponding placement problem is simply independent of the WDT theory we might give for the language and thoughts in question.⁷

In any case, I've shown that even if the linguistic view is right, it's only a short step to metaphysical placement problems about truthmakers. A WDT theory does not solve this problem or show that we can ignore it. So LAMT false. Moreover, it's not false just because there are counterexamples. It is *always* false – false in all cases. No WDT theory of a discourse is sufficient to non-metaphysically resolve its placement problem.

I'm not arguing that all traditional metaphysical approaches to all elements of placement problems are correct or even intelligible. It may be that the only coherent or illuminating answers we can get regarding a particular problem are given by a WDT-theory, or simply by ignoring metaphysical approaches altogether. Instead I'm just arguing that non-representationalism itself doesn't undermine metaphysical questions. This leaves open that metaphysical investigations might draw a blank, and thus force us to take a different approach. For example, metaethical expressivism by itself doesn't undermine metaphysical questions about ethics. But this doesn't mean that traditional metaphysical approaches to questions like how to explain the supervenience of the ethical on the non-ethical will always be fruitful. It just means that expressivism itself doesn't show us that such questions can be avoided from the beginning.

Moreover, note how none of my argument relied on the specific localist view about representational features. Unlike my argument against GAMT,

⁷ Note also that the case of the mental is likely to be a no-exit case anyway. WDT theories typically talk about the mental states of language users, and if they do that in the case of words like 'belief' and 'mind' these will be no-exit cases. While we might try to offer a behaviourist WDT theory of our language about the mental, if this fails, we have a no-exit case.

which relied on globalists' acceptance of relations with subject matter, my argument against LAMT is based on more general considerations, namely that explaining what some language does and why it's there does not answer or undermine questions about what makes sentences in that language true. As such, we should not think just that LAMT is false. Rather, the anti-metaphysical thesis in general is false, and not only because it has some counterexamples but because *no* placement problem is resolved by non-representationalists' WDT theories.

So in fact, whether local or global, non-representationalism never has the anti-metaphysical impact many think it has. We can now tie this back to the basic anti-metaphysical idea. The idea – no representational relations, no questions about the relata – is right *only if* we're only thinking about the WDT theory itself. But it is wrong in general. Non-representationalism doesn't avoid metaphysics.

6.5 Consequences

So far, then, we've seen that even if non-representationalists avoid subject matter in their WDT theories, truthmaker questions remain. Non-representationalism plots no route around metaphysics. I now want to draw some general consequences from this conclusion.

6.5.1 Vindication

The first concerns metaethical expressivism. My argument undermines the common idea that expressivism *vindicates* ethical language in a way that fends off error theory and allows us to treat ethics as naturalistically acceptable. Expressivists argue that their WDT theory explains how ethical language expresses attitudes but crucially also shows how this is compatible with the fact that ethical language 'looks like' representational language, admits of ascriptions of truth, knowledge, and so on. Several expressivists have argued that this vindicates ethical language by protecting it from error theory, and showing how ethical language can be understood naturalistically.

As Price (2013, p.150) points out, Blackburn defines *quasi-realism*, the project of giving the WDT theory described above, as involving this consequence:

QUASI-REALISM: a position holding that an expressivist or projectivist account of ethics can explain and make legitimate sense of the realist-sounding discourse within which we promote and debate moral views. This is in opposition to writers who think that if projectivism is correct then our ordinary ways of thinking in terms of a moral truth, or of knowledge, or the independence of ethical facts from our subjective sentiments, must all be in error, reflecting a mistaken realist metaphysics. The quasi-realist seeks to earn our right to talk in these terms on the slender, projective basis. (Blackburn, 1994, p.315)

Elsewhere Blackburn argues that quasi-realism can be used to ‘urge that there is no error in our ordinary ways of thought and our ordinary commitments and passions’ (Blackburn, 1985, p.158), and as we saw above he takes solving the placement problem for ethics to involve showing how our ethical thought doesn’t ‘offend’ against our world-view.

Blackburn is not alone in this view. Allan Gibbard claims that expressivism shows us that ethical concepts ‘aren’t hocus-pocus’, and ‘vindicates concepts that we might otherwise find raise an inescapable anomaly’ (Gibbard, 2003, p.196). Nick Zangwill argues that expressivism shows us ‘not only why we do moralize, but also why we *ought* to’ (1993, p.293). Price even argues that Blackburn’s definition isn’t strong enough: he argues that it wrongly suggests there could be a version of quasi-realism which is *compatible* with error theory. Price argues that this would simply be a reductio of expressivism, ‘which is intended to be an *interpretation* of our ordinary ways of thinking and talking’ (2013, pp.150-1). So not only does Price think that expressivism doesn’t entail error theory: he thinks it actually rules out error theory is false.

However, this is false. Expressivism doesn’t rule out error theory: the two are completely compatible. All expressivism does is explain the existence of ethical thought and language. In this sense it makes it non-mysterious. But it doesn’t show that any ethical sentence is true, no more than explaining the existence of religious practices shows that any religious beliefs are true. Earlier we saw that Blackburn aims to show why it doesn’t offend against anything in our world-view for us to think in ethical terms (§6.5). However all this can mean here is that the very fact that we have ethical thoughts is not itself an anti-naturalistic mystery. It doesn’t show

that any of those thoughts are true, nor crucially that ethical thoughts can be made true by naturalistic truths.

There is a further idea here: that by understanding that ethical language functions to express attitudes, we vindicate its use to do this. Here's a brief summary of this line of thought, from Huw Price:

The fact that there are no moral properties in the natural world does not entail that moral talk is in error, if its function is not to describe such properties.⁸ (Price, 1997, p.141)

We might read this like so: if there are no moral properties, ethical language is not in error, since its function is to express attitudes and not describe those properties. This doesn't follow. If there are no moral properties, then by the deflationary reading of properties, nothing is good, bad, permissible, required, and so on. Hence any sentence calling something good, bad, and so on, is false. Our language is in error.

At this point, we might point out, as Price does, that ethical language's *job* or *function* is not to describe ethical properties. But we can *only* read this as saying that its best explanation does not mention describing ethical properties. And we've seen that this doesn't imply that it does not also describe ethical properties, in a deflationary sense. Moreover it doesn't imply that there *are* ethical properties either. It is neutral on this issue. At best, it shows us that when we use ethical language to express attitudes, we're not making a semantic mistake, using a term to mean something other than what it really means in our language. But the fact that I don't make a semantic mistake with an utterance does not mean it is true. So even noting the *function* – the 'what it does' – of ethical language does not vindicate it.⁹

The same goes for the idea that expressivism reveals the *purpose* of our ethical thoughts and language and thereby vindicates it (Zangwill, 1993, p.293). This does not entail that any ethical sentence is true. It only shows us why we have ethical language. It doesn't justify any particular ethical utterance, and at best it only gives us a practical justification for using ethical language in the first place. But a practical justification is not an epistemic one: the fact that it is practically useful for me to have a belief doesn't entail

⁸ Price follows this with an argument along the lines I just refuted above: that expressivism can explain the existence of ethical language in a way compatible with its expressing attitudes, and hence vindicates it.

⁹ Compare a Gricean view which says that 'magic' expresses beliefs about magic. This doesn't vindicate magic-talk, beyond showing that my nephew is not confused about the meaning of 'magic' when he says that his grandmother is magic.

that it is true. In this case, the fact that it is useful for us to have language which expresses attitudes doesn't entail that any of our ethical beliefs are true.

There is a deeper explanation of this failure to vindicate ethical language. Expressivists take claims about ethical truth to count as *first-order* – claims *within* ethics. These are just as substantively ethical as claims about the morality of torture. Whether there are any ethical truths is an ethical matter, just as whether there are any white ravens is an ornithological matter. However, expressivists also claim that their WDT theory is entirely free of ethical language and any mention of ethical subject matter. So it's not a surprise that their WDT theory is *detached* from ethical truth in this way, so that it's compatible with their theory that there are no ethical truths at all. I will explore this idea more in my concluding chapter.

Moreover, this consequence isn't limited to ethics. In general, suitably detached, subject matter-free WDT theories will fail to vindicate the language they are explaining. They will leave it open that there are no truths in the relevant domain. As such, they will still leave the placement problem open: they will not tell us what, if anything, makes the relevant truths true. Even though non-representationalists will argue that such questions are first-order, this does not mean they are not metaphysical, nor that we don't need to answer them in order properly to vindicate the language.

6.5.2 Not naturalism, not non-naturalism?

A similar consequence is that my conclusion undermines the idea that expressivists can avoid both reductionism *and* non-naturalists' commitment to non-natural ethical facts and properties. For instance, Blackburn argues that expressivism 'avoids naturalistic reductions' (Blackburn, 2009, p.207). Elsewhere he rejects 'a reductive naturalism' which proceeds by 'identifying moral and evaluative properties with natural properties or clusters of natural properties', yet then goes on to profess 'much less sympathy with the contemporary alternative that thinks moral properties are quite different from natural properties, and that thereupon resurrects the long-dead corpse of intuitionistic non-naturalism' (Blackburn, 2015, p.844). In other words, Blackburn is arguing that his view avoids both reductive naturalism and non-naturalism.¹⁰

¹⁰ Gibbard seems more resolutely naturalist. See Gibbard (2003, pp.181ff), (2013, pp.31ff).

Price defends a similar idea, saying that his non-representationalist view gives us an alternative to reductionism and non-naturalism. For instance, he describes his ‘discourse pluralism’ (an earlier name for non-representationalism) in the following way:

The first contrast is therefore with *reductionism* ... For the reductionist moral discourse is legitimate because it actually is natural discourse, albeit disguised natural discourse. A pluralist wants both autonomy and legitimacy, whereas a reductionist is prepared to sacrifice the former in the interests of the latter. (Price, 1992, p.39)

What Price’s terminology means here is that the discourse pluralist wants to avoid reduction – and thereby preserve the ‘autonomy’ of ethics, since it is independent of natural facts in some sense – yet preserve the ‘legitimacy’ of ethical language, in other words not reject it as steeped in error. Price also contrasts his view with what he calls ‘additive monism’ (Price, 1992, p.40), the view that there are further, extra non-natural ethical facts which we describe using genuinely descriptive language. He contrasts his non-representationalist approach with this.

Reductionism can mean different things. It can be a semantic enterprise: showing that ethical sentences mean the same as ones featuring only natural terms. It can also be a metaphysical claim: ethical sentences are made true by completely natural truths. We can outline corresponding senses of non-naturalism: denying that ethical sentences mean the same as natural ones, or that ethical sentences are made true by natural truths.

There are also claims which are perhaps a mix of these, for instance that ethical predicates refer to natural properties, or that ethical sentences can be given natural truth-conditions. It is not clear whether these are purely semantic claims: that ‘water’ refers to H_2O and that ‘x is water’ is true iff x is H_2O are not obviously claims about the meanings of those terms. Someone may understand the term ‘water’ and yet be surprised to learn that it refers to H_2O , and that their sentences using that word have truth conditions involving H_2O .

Expressivism does avoid reducing ethical meaning: it denies that ethical sentences are equivalent in meaning to any natural sentence. It also denies that we should understand ethical sentences in terms of representing natural facts in a certain way. Insofar as we think giving truth-conditions is a way

of specifying the meaning of a sentence, they will deny that any natural statement will give the truth-conditions of ethical statements. And insofar as saying what property a word like 'good' refers to says what it means, they will deny that it refers to any such property. In all these respects, they will agree with non-naturalists. However, they also disagree with typical non-naturalists because they think ethical language is best explained in non-representationalist terms. So expressivism does indeed avoid both naturalist and non-naturalist claims about ethical meaning.

However, things are not so clear when we turn to the metaphysical element of reductionism. This concerns whether ethical sentences are made true by natural truths. As we've seen, such questions are entirely independent of expressivists' distinctive, ethics-free WDT theories. Given deflationism, these questions are about what it is in virtue of which things are good, bad, and so on. And so whether expressivists can avoid this kind of reductionism depends on whether they think all ethical truths can be explained by natural ones. If they cannot, they must accept a non-naturalist view.

So it isn't true that expressivists can avoid both naturalism and non-naturalism, because they leave unanswered the truthmaker questions whose answers distinguish those views. The idea that they can avoid these views is based on the view that their WDT theories are sufficient to resolve the placement problem, which we've seen is false. Expressivists now face the question: what makes ethical statements true? Whichever way they answer, they will count as either naturalists or non-naturalists.

However, we might argue that expressivists can now accept non-naturalism about ethical truthmakers without getting into metaphysical trouble. In other words, they can deny that all ethical truths can be explained by natural ones, yet their view will not entail any untoward metaphysical commitments, anything 'occult or Platonic or mysterious waiting to puzzle us' as Blackburn puts it (Blackburn, 2012, p.195). I think there is something to this idea. However we need to make sense of it very carefully.

To start with, note that expressivism, if it succeeds, manages to avoid talking about ethics in its WDT theory, and therefore will avoid giving an account of ethical language and thought in terms of its relation with ethical subject matter. Therefore, even if they accept that ethical truths are non-natural, or have no natural truthmakers, they will still not have to give such things any explanatory role. This is a big advantage. Expressivists don't have to show how we can be in the relevant meaning-constituting relations with

such things, nor how those relations can explain the intrinsic motivating nature of ethical beliefs, the fact that ethical beliefs seem to motivate us by themselves, unlike other beliefs which must combine with desires to make us act.¹¹

However, this doesn't mean there are no adverse consequences of accepting non-natural ethical truths. For instance, expressivists will have to admit that there are some ethical truths which are inexplicable on a natural basis, and indeed they will want to admit that some of these are simply inexplicable, brute truths. They will end up saying that maximising happiness, for instance, *just is* good, or that causing pain for enjoyment *just is* bad. Moreover, as Toppinen (Forthcoming) argues, expressivists also face the challenge of explaining the supervenience of the ethical on the non-ethical: why it is that there can be no change in ethical truths without there being a change in the non-ethical truths too. Toppinen argues that expressivists can explain this more easily than non-naturalists, but the important point is that expressivists are not *automatically* rescued from such problems by their ethics-free WDT theory. There is no blanket anti-metaphysical consequence for expressivists here – just as non-representationalism more generally has no blanket anti-metaphysical implication. Expressivists cannot simply say: we avoid reduction, and we also avoid the ontological consequences of non-naturalism. Instead, they must look at those consequences and resolve them on a piecemeal basis, like Toppinen does regarding supervenience.

The same goes for questions about mind-independence too. Expressivists have argued that they too can accept that ethical truth is mind-independent.¹² Sharon Street (2011, p.8) goes so far as to say it's an essential part of expressivism. But as with naturalism and non-naturalism, expressivism is neutral on mind-independence. It can accept it, it can reject it. Moreover, as Street herself argues, this brings up metaphysical problems for expressivists, in Street's case problems about evolution and moral scepticism.

This isn't to say that all the metaphysical questions about ethics *can* be resolved in metaphysical ways. As I said, I am not arguing this, but instead that expressivism by itself doesn't undermine those approaches. So for instance this leaves open that in the end, there is *no* satisfactory metaphysical explanation of supervenience, and that the only illuminating theory

¹¹ Expressivists also avoid the problems associated with naturalist accounts, like Moore's open question argument and the Moral Twin Earth problem. See McPherson (2013) for more on these problems.

¹² See e.g. Gibbard (2003, p.186), (Blackburn, 1998, pp.311ff).

here is the expressivist's WDT theory. The important point is just that expressivism by itself doesn't imply that there's no satisfactory metaphysical explanation, nor that we needn't look for one.

As with vindication, the same result holds in other areas. For instance, consider causation. A Humean expressivist might think that causal beliefs (beliefs in causes) are best understood as inferential dispositions: to believe that A caused B is, perhaps, to be disposed to infer B-type events from A-type events, or perhaps to be disposed so that one *expects* to some degree a B-type event on learning that an A-type event happened.¹³ This view does not vindicate causal language: it does not prove that there are causes. Nor does it *avoid* reductionism. It leaves us the choice of saying that all causal truths are explained by non-causal truths, or else are not.

One way of saying that causal truths are explained by non-causal ones is to defend a so-called constant conjunction view: for As to cause Bs is for As to be constantly conjoined with Bs, and for a specific *a* to have caused *b* is for *a* to be of a kind A whose instances are constantly conjoined with those of a kind B of which *b* is an instance. Another would be to appeal to counterfactual truths: *a* caused *b* iff if *a* hadn't occurred, *b* wouldn't have, and in the closest non-actual world where *a* does occur, *b* does too. Other views don't try to explain causal truths in terms of non-causal ones. For instance, we could appeal to a primitive, unanalysable causal relation C such that for *a* to cause *b* is for C to relate these two events; or to properties which bestow causal powers. Or we could accept any of the other theories of causation on offer. The important thing is this: if we understand these views as answers to questions about truthmakers for causal statements, then expressivism about causal language and thought by itself rules out *none* of these views, and rules *in* none of them either. It only affects these views insofar as they purport to offer explanations of causal language and thought, since expressivism gives an alternative one. While it is true that often metaphysical views are given in this spirit, this is not necessary.

What I've tried to show is that if we take non-representationalism seriously, we pull apart metaphysics and the project of explaining meaning and use (which some people call *metasemantics*), to the extent that the latter doesn't avoid, undermine, or trivialise the former. In my concluding remarks in the next chapter, I will explore this theme more fully.

¹³ Earlier I argued that causation is a likely no-exit case. Assume for this paragraph that it isn't – since if it is, expressivism has no metaphysical impact anyway.

6.6 Conclusion

In this chapter I've targeted the *basic anti-metaphysical idea*, the view that since non-representationalists avoid representational relations, they avoid metaphysical questions about what is represented, and what makes our representations true. I've argued that this idea is false. The best way to interpret it is in terms of the core non-representationalist view, explanatory scepticism. This yields what I've called the anti-metaphysical thesis AMT:

Anti-metaphysical thesis (AMT) For any discourse D, a WDT theory of D which does not treat D as representational provides a non-metaphysical resolution of the placement problem for D.

This comes in global and local versions, since globalists and localists disagree about what it means to treat something as representational.

The global version of this thesis is false because of no-exit cases, cases where we cannot explain a discourse without invoking its subject matter. In such cases, our distinctive WDT theory of the discourse raises the very questions about its subject matter that we wanted to avoid. So even if global non-representationalism is true, it does not avoid metaphysics in general.

Even more worryingly for non-representationalists, it turns out that even the localist version of AMT, which automatically avoids problems with no-exit cases, is false. This is because WDT theories are not enough to resolve placement problems. Placement problems may well originate with questions about language and thought, but there's no reason to think that they are just about explaining the existence of that language and thought. Truthmaker questions remain even on this linguistic view of placement problems. Moreover, we have plenty of reason to doubt the linguistic view of placement problems in the first place: plenty of metaphysical worries arise not as questions about language and thought but from our first-hand experience of puzzling phenomena.

As such, neither local nor global non-representationalism avoids metaphysics. The basic anti-metaphysical idea seems reasonable, but only because it implies that non-representationalists *reject* representation and similar features. If we take non-representationalists seriously when they say they don't reject such things but simply ignore them for explanatory purposes, the basic anti-metaphysical idea collapses.

This has some interesting consequences. It undermines metaethical expressivists' aspirations to be neither naturalist nor non-naturalist about the metaphysics of ethics, and their claims to have vindicated ethical language in any sense that would let us avoid truthmaker questions. It turns out that metaethical expressivism offers no answers to these truthmaker questions, but most importantly does not show us that such questions do not need answers, or cannot be given them.

This concludes the main body of this thesis. In the next, concluding chapter, I will summarise the main points I have argued for in this thesis, and draw some wider conclusions from them.

CHAPTER 7

CONCLUSION

7.1 Main points

Let me briefly summarise what I take to be the key points I have argued for in this thesis:

1. Non-representationalism should be understood primarily as the view that *representational features* play no role in explaining the meaning and/or use of a given area of language and thought; I've been calling this view *explanatory scepticism*. We can characterise non-representationalists' explanations of a given area of language and thought as 'what it does and why it's there' theories. (Chapter 2)
2. By adopting and defending this view with regard to ethical language and thought, and giving a suitably neutral reading of representational features, metaethical expressivists can solve the problem of creeping minimalism, which we should understand as the problem of distinguishing expressivism from *representationalism* rather than *realism*. (Chapter 3)
3. Reading local and global non-representationalism in terms of explanatory scepticism, we find that localists and globalists differ over what features they think count as representational. As such, the debate between them is merely verbal: localists already accept globalists' globalism, and globalists already accept localists' localism. We should therefore also not assume globalism has the same kinds of impact as local non-representationalism, nor that it is as radical as it first seems. We should also consider the local/global debate resolved. (Chapter 4)

4. Deflationism about truth, facts and properties makes almost no difference to truthmaker theory. As such, non-representationalists' commitment to it does not affect their relationship to metaphysical questions about truthmakers for a given area of language and thought. (Chapter 5)
5. Non-representationalists' explanatory scepticism, and their interest in giving 'what it does and why it's there' theories, does not make metaphysical questions about the area of language for which they give that theory (i) avoidable, (ii) unanswerable, (iii) trivial, or (iv) non-metaphysical. Instead it leaves them untouched and does not affect whether they need answers. (Chapters 5-6)
6. As such, non-representationalism, properly understood as explanatory scepticism about representational features, does not have the metaphysical impact often thought for it.

I now want to conclude by briefly discussing a broader consequence of these points, and pointing to what I think are promising directions for future work on this topic.

7.2 Non-representationalism and the 'ism's

In the previous chapter I concluded by saying that non-representationalism does not avoid metaphysical questions about truthmakers for the area of language and thought under investigation. In particular, I showed how non-representationalist views are compatible with different views about the truthmakers for a given range of claims. For instance, metaethical expressivism is compatible with both naturalism and non-naturalism about ethics, but also with *error theory*, the view that there are no ethical truths.

I want to put this point together with my discussion of creeping minimalism in metaethics. In Chapter 3 I argued that we should not try to distinguish expressivism from realism: instead we should distinguish it from representationalism. The reason I gave there was that we also need to distinguish expressivism from error theory, which shares with realism a representationalist view of ethical thought and language, and that since error theorists have vastly different views about ethical truths, facts and properties, the approach offered by Dreier, which is based on these things, would not satisfactorily do this.

However, there is a further, deeper reason for not distinguishing between expressivism and realism, namely that expressivism isn't really distinct from realism in the way the problem of creeping minimalism presupposes. The problem presupposes that expressivism is not realism. However, formulated as a view about ethical truths and their mind-independence, realism is perfectly compatible with expressivism. Expressivism is a claim about what explains ethical language: realism need not be understood as a claim of this kind.

Indeed, insofar as we understand popular metaethical positions as claims about ethical truths and their truthmakers, expressivism is perfectly compatible with them all. True, many such positions have been defended in conjunction with representationalism about ethical thought. But these are separable, and expressivists have shown us why: because claims about ethical truths and what makes them true need not be understood as attempts at explaining ethical language and thought. The former claims are *first-order* (though I've shown that this does not make them non-metaphysical), and expressivism is second-order.

However, I'm not saying that expressivism *entails* realism. As we saw in the previous chapter, some argue that non-representationalist views are intrinsically realist but in a metaphysics-undermining sense: they *vindicate* the language in question, but in a way which makes any further metaphysical theorising redundant. This is realism but not of a metaphysical kind. I rejected such a view in the previous chapter: expressivism doesn't vindicate ethical language in the relevant sense here. So expressivism does not *entail* realism in any sense. Instead the two are compatible – but expressivism is equally compatible with error theory, or mind-dependence views like constructivism.

More generally, non-representationalism is not one of the traditional 'ism's we come across. It isn't anti-realist, and it isn't realist, so long as we think of the latter as positions about the truth and mind-independence of the domain in question. But nor does it collapse the debate here, or make it non-metaphysical. It's just *neutral*.

The overarching moral here is this: if we take non-representationalists seriously in their shift away from *rejecting* representational features, and therefore understand their view as concerning the explanatory role of those features, we deprive it of its metaphysical impact. For the metaphysical problems some think it avoids are independent of the explanatory role of

representational features. Recall the basic anti-metaphysical idea: no representation, no metaphysical questions about what is represented. This simply cannot work if non-representationalists do not say ‘no representation’ but instead ‘in our WDT theory, no representation’. A similar point applies in the case of truthmaking and deflationism: thinking the latter undermines the former involves thinking that truthmaking is a relation in the strong sense between language and the world. But this is completely optional: without it, deflationism has no impact on truthmaking.

7.3 Does non-representationalism make a difference?

We might then wonder if non-representationalism is interesting at all, and whether it has anything interesting to tell us, if it doesn’t have the metaphysical impact many have argued it has. I think it is interesting and it does have interesting and important things to say. Indeed I think non-representationalism is really just getting started: only in the last few years have philosophers begun to fully appreciate and explore the explanatory nature of the view and the consequences of this. In this section I will sketch out why I think non-representationalism makes a difference.

Perhaps unsurprisingly, non-representationalism is going to make a difference primarily to our explanations of language and thought. Since it is at its core a view about what explains thought and language, here it will have its impact. And as such, we can recast the basic anti-metaphysical idea in a different way. Rather than ‘no representation, no metaphysical questions about what’s represented’, we get the idea that if we don’t need representation to explain some area of language and thought, we don’t need its subject matter to do so. This is very close to the basic anti-metaphysical idea, except that it draws from non-representationalists’ avoidance of representational features *not* a metaphysical consequence but a consequence for our explanations of thought and meaning, what some would call a *metasemantic* consequence. So here we have the *basic metasemantic idea*: no representation, no explanatory role for what is represented.

The basic metasemantic idea does not let non-representationalists avoid metaphysics as such. Note that since global non-representationalists are happy to use the subject matter of a discourse to explain it, this idea will simply not apply in their case. Instead it only applies to those kinds of non-representationalism which do avoid subject matter – and then it doesn’t

let them avoid *metaphysics*. But it *does* let them avoid implausible theories about what explains our thought and language. I think this point vindicates much of what non-representationalists have actually argued, although this is often cashed out as a sweeping metaphysical consequence rather than a more limited result applying to our explanations of meaning and use. I will now illustrate this by discussing the key example of non-representationalism, metaethical expressivism.

We've seen that expressivism does not avoid or otherwise undermine the question about what makes ethical truths true – whether this includes only natural truths or non-natural ones as well. But it does have an important consequence here. It gives us an alternative to typical representationalist naturalist and non-naturalist explanations of the meaning and use of ethical thought and language. For a naturalist who accepts representationalism needs to understand ethical thought in terms of representing the world as having ethical features, and needs to understand those features as natural. For a non-naturalist representationalist, ethical thought must be explained in terms of representing the world as having non-natural ethical features.

Both of these views face problems.¹ I will not go into these now. The important thing is that while expressivism doesn't automatically avoid the *metaphysical* problems with these views, it does give a genuine alternative when it comes to explaining ethical thought and meaning. For expressivism doesn't have to explain ethical beliefs in terms of a special subject matter: a cluster of natural properties, or *sui generis* non-natural properties, for instance. Nor does it have to explain them in terms of a special representational relation: representing as good, for instance. Instead it explains them in terms of familiar, naturalistically describable mental states: intentions, plans, emotions, and so on.

This does make a difference, at least in principle. And it's a difference which expressivists have already emphasised. For instance in a recent paper discussing Sturgeon and Boyd's moral realism, Simon Blackburn explicitly says that he accepts the core tenets of Boyd's view which concern moral truth and mind-independence (Blackburn, 2015, p.844). He goes on to give a critique not of Boyd and Sturgeon's metaphysical commitments *per se* but rather the explanation they give of ethical thought and language, for instance arguing against Boyd's causal theory of ethical predicate meaning (Blackburn, 2015, p.850). Blackburn draws out this idea to present his op-

¹ McPherson (2013) gives a nice overview.

position to representationalism, where he opposes his position, incorrectly in my view, to ‘metaphysics’. But the idea is clear: expressivism still makes a difference when it comes to explaining ethical thought and language. It offers a different kind of view, which may be able to avoid problems with representationalist ones.

There are two related points of interest here. The first is that my argument that non-representationalism doesn’t avoid metaphysics may actually help the view, by making it more appealing to those who see no problem with metaphysics. If we can combine metaphysical inquiry with non-representationalist explanations of meaning – and in particular if we needn’t *reject* representational features in order to take up such explanations – then non-representationalism looks more attractive. This applies across the board, not just ethics.

The second is an interesting potential consequence concerning non-naturalism. In recent years there has been a resurgence of interest in metaethical non-naturalism, the view that there are ethical truths, that they are mind-independent, but different in kind to natural truths.² In the previous chapter I explained this view’s position on truthmakers for ethical truths as the view that some non-natural truths are brute, inexplicable by anything, including natural truths. I showed that this is compatible with non-representationalism.

Expressivists may have some sympathy for the idea that there are brute ethical truths that cannot be explained by the natural. So they might not object to non-naturalism on these grounds: they may think that even a generally naturalistic outlook can tolerate such things. However, they can make a different argument instead. Non-naturalists’ views about ethical truths and their truthmakers may not be objectionable by themselves, but the view they must take about what explains ethical thought and language *will* be, for naturalistic reasons. This is because the phenomenon of ethical thought and language is itself a naturalistic phenomenon: it is part of human thought and language, and crucially, this belongs in the causal, spatiotemporal realm. As such, non-naturalists have to explain how such naturalistic phenomena came about, or at least give a sketch of how such an explanation might go. But their metaphysical materials – i.e. ethical truths – are all non-natural, causally isolated truths. So it’s hard to see how such an ontology is meant to

² See Scanlon (2014); Parfit (2011); Shafer-Landau (2010); Cuneo & Shafer-Landau (2014); Enoch (2011); Dworkin (2011)

be part of a credible explanation of a natural phenomenon. It's one thing to say that ethical truths themselves don't need a naturalistic explanation: it's another to say that ethical thought and language doesn't either.

Expressivists have a unique advantage here. They can avoid trying to explain ethical thought and language, a natural phenomenon, in terms of representational relations with natural features of things, since no such relations give a good explanation. But they can also avoid the non-naturalists' explanations, and offer something genuinely naturalistic instead. Since this is all compatible with different views about what ethical truths are and what makes them true, expressivism gives us a new dimension in which theories can differ: they can be realist or not, naturalist or not, and crucially representationalist or not. The latter choice has previously been seen as part of the 'realist or not' choice by those who understand expressivism as denying that there are ethical truths; and it has been seen as overriding or even *collapsing* the other choices by contemporary expressivists. But the truth is that it is just an additional choice: it reveals a new set of positions in the debate.

This is just one way that non-representationalism can make a difference, when we understand it in terms of explanatory scepticism. By taking this route seriously, we can now accommodate metaphysical inquiry *alongside* non-representationalist theories of the meaning and use of various areas of language. We can also focus non-representationalists' arguments not on the metaphysical commitments of rival theories *per se*, but on the commitments they make to explain the language and thought in question. However, we should recognise that non-representationalists must answer truthmaking questions, and as such are vulnerable to any problems which their answers to those questions may face.

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